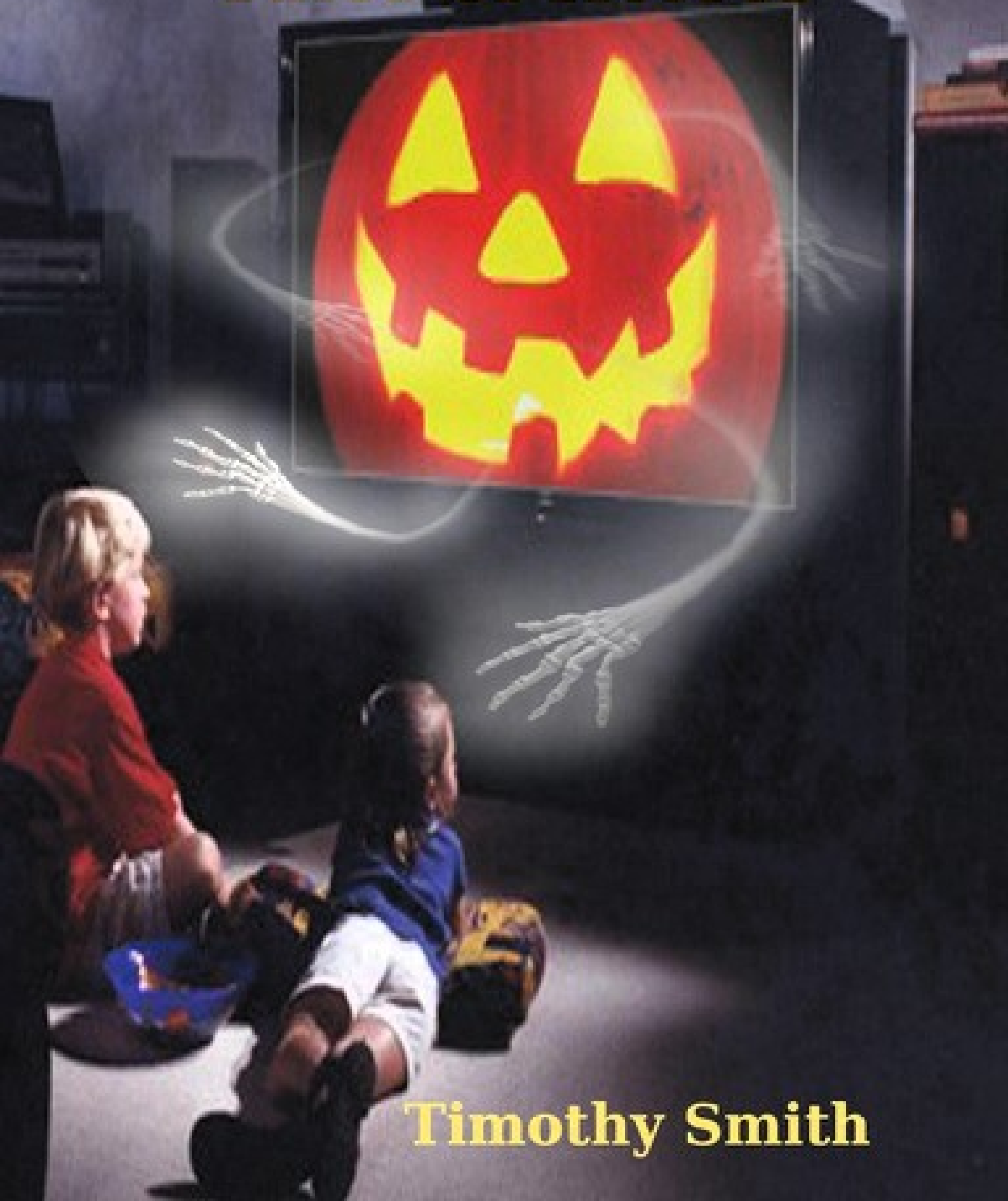


Beyond Halloween Tales of Horror



Timothy Smith

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Introduction

Halloween has always been a holiday filled with mystery, magic and superstition. It began as a Celtic end-of-summer festival during which people felt especially close to relatives and friends that have passed away. People would set places at the dinner table, leave treats on doorsteps and along the side of the road. They also lit candles to help loved ones find their way back to the spirit world to greet loved ones by the fire. In addition to these friendly spirits, evil spirits also roamed the earth in search of human vessels to take over or terrorize. Horrific tales are not just told around Halloween but sometimes on a summer night around a camp fire. After all, these are just frightful stories we tell ourselves to entertain our deepest fears. Tim Smith, freelance writer from Northridge, California brings you the eerie short stories surrounding the beloved holiday in ‘BEYOND HALLOWEEN: Tales of Horror.’”

“TRICK OR TREATING”

SOMEONE WAS KNOCKING ON THE DOOR. Alfred sat on the floor in the living room, knees pressed against his chest and he stared at the front door.

His mother was thankful Alfred wanted to stay home because she was looking forward to the office's Halloween party. It has been five hours since his parents left Alfred alone.

The lights in the house were off, the porch light was off and Alfred had a bowl of Snickers and Hershey Bars that should have been gone hours ago. Alfred sat in the dark waiting for this night to be over or the return of his parents, whichever came first.

Sweat beads started to form on his forehead. He started to shiver not from the cold but from fear. He was looking at the front window looking for shadows from the reflection of the glow of the jack o' lantern on the porch.

“Please Jesus... make them go away... please... The Lord is my Sheppard”, Alfred mumbled under breath as he rocked himself with his knees pressed against his chest still, hugging himself like a little boy.

There was another knock on the door. Alfred screamed in horror at the sound of the knock.

“Go away! Please for the love of God! Go away!” he screamed in a hysterical tone. There was silence at the front door then a moment later there was a soft sound of a small girl.

“Trick or Treat mister” the innocent girl behind the front door said.

“Go away! We have no more candy, Halloween is over! Go home!” Alfred screamed back at the front door never once trying to get up from the living room floor.

“Trick or Treat Mister, come on... it's Halloween. Don't you want to see my Cinderella costume? My mommy and I made it from scratch last weekend” the voice persisted behind the door.

Alfred at the point of going mad shook his head. *"No. No. No. No. You are not real"*

"Mister, I am lost. Can you call my mommy please? I am afraid. Okay, I said it. I am afraid, please open the door" the voice behind the door pleaded.

Alfred yelled, *"Go away! Leave me alone! I am calling the cops! Get off my property!"* Alfred crawled on the living room floor like he was in a foxhole in a battlefield, reaching for the phone in the dark. He was about to grab the phone off the end table when the voice spoke again.

"Open THIS DOOR!" the girl screamed but this time it was not the little girl but a voice that sounded like something Alfred never heard before, a voice of pure evil and hunger. This thing that wanted him to open the door was hungry; that was certain. Alfred lunged for the phone in the dark at the sound of the voice and grabbed the telephone. He put the receiver to his ear and dialed 9-1-1. He listened for the ring and heard a little girl giggling at the other end of the line.

"Trick of Treat Mister" the little girl giggled on the telephone. Alfred dropped the telephone and ran out of the living room to the kitchen knocking off pictures and other household items on the coffee table in the process. When Alfred got into the kitchen, he opened the kitchen center drawer and pulled out a steak knife and slumped to the kitchen floor pointing the knife in front of him as if something was going to appear in front of him in the dark. He waited for the more determined thing at the door to return but there was no more outbursts or knocking at the door. Alfred strained his hearing trying to pinpoint some kind of movement on the porch but only heard his rapid breathing and the sound of the operator in the living room from the dropped telephone; *"If you would like to make a call, please hang up and dial again."* Alfred found the courage within himself and walked to the front door very slowly knife in hand.

He looked out the window and saw an empty porch and an empty street. He stepped out on the porch and took a deep breath of fresh air, feeling born again. Whatever haunted him this night, it was over and he won. He went back inside the house and locked the front door. He reached for a Snickers bar

and tore the wrapper eager for some sugar. When Alfred turned around to pick up the telephone, he dropped his candy bar and felt wetness on his leg not realizing he had wet himself at the sight that was standing before him. A dark sinister voice said. *"Trick or Treat"* and Alfred screamed for the last time.

The End



SHADOW PEOPLE”

Chapter One

“Reflections”

DEPRESSION HAD ARRIVED at the residence of Mr. Worley’s house like an unwanted house guest. It was a cool autumn afternoon in October, a week before Halloween. Halloween was one of Charlie’s favorite holidays as a child but the holiday now reminds him of faded memories of years gone by and a little boy that was full of life and promise. This boy grew into a bitter middle aged man, alone and unfocused. His condo was a glorified three bedroom apartment with cheap pictures of various landscapes found in any dollar store but it was home to Charlie. His needs were simple or he just simply did not care. Today was like every other day and the day before that, lonesome and with the holidays around the corner, loneliness seemed almost unbearable. Charlie sat in his favorite old beat up tan recliner alone, reflecting on his life. His reflection from the wall mirror scares him. Who is this man staring back at him? I think it is me he thinks to himself but a part of him, the part that used to embrace life screams from within “That is not me! I am not that person!” Charlie sees the old worn out tired man staring back at him, a second later he sees the happy tan young man he once was and then the gray haired man again. “What are you doing man? Everyone has control over their own destiny! Stop your whining, get back on the horse!” His thoughts race through his head as he argues with his inner self.

“It saddens me how fast you let the years go by” the other voice tells the voice within Charlie’s head. *“You are only 35 years old, you are told by many; you’re in the prime of your life.” Yet you are at your life’s end as I see it. It has not been a fun journey and the emotions and fears you have experienced are strong robbing you of life’s joys”.*

It has been five years this month since Charlie was last published. All hopes of being a successful writer seemed like a bitter naïve dream of his youth, where one thought he could be anything even President. Isn’t that what parents tell their children? Honey, if you put your mind to it, you can be anything you want to be. Sometimes that is not the case even as young

adults we keep on pushing, trying to be the best and always coming in last.

“Don’t listen to that hog wash, you will get your groove back, and you wait and see, you are a writer; you will have fans!” the positive voice tries to chime in.

“Not everyone can be winners, there are losers as well. You cannot have light without darkness, good without evil. You get my drift” the darker voice said getting the last word.

Charlie sighed and got up from his chair and grabbed the television remote control and switched the television on, a commercial came on about shampoo or some damn thing. He quickly turned the television off and tossed the controller onto the couch. He walked over to the refrigerator, opened the door and saw his bottle of wine there welcoming him. He took the bottle and took a glass from the cabinet. He stared at the bottle and instead of pouring a glass of wine into the glass; he poured the wine into the sink.

“What are you doing you dumb ass?” the darker voice screamed.

“Good for you, you don’t need that crap” the other voice affirmed.

“Yes you do! How else are you going to get some sleep? How long has it been since you had a good night sleep, you need that shit? You need some happy juice to bring on the zzzz’s my man” the darker voice chimed in almost in an unfamiliar voice to his own. *“You could kill yourself; that would stop the pain; you can sleep forever and ever.”*

“Stop it! You are not going to kill yourself, think of your family! You will go to Hell; it says so in the bible” the positive side of his thoughts screamed.

“Rubbish, don’t listen to that, you know what you have to do. Your life sucks, you have done nothing with your life, good men and women die every day and the likes of you, a washed out mystery writer continues to live and take up space. You know

what you have to do, pick up the tape recorder and dictate your suicide letter. God only knows you have not used it for its intended purposes, when was the last time you dictated on that damned thing" the darker voice said more calmly in Charlie's head as it had reached victory.

"*Why not?*" Charlie said out loud as he walked to his computer desk, stared at the computer screen with Microsoft Word open, only one page of text was written and he turned off the computer by turning off the computer improperly. He did not save his work.

"That's right, no sense in saving your work if you are going to kill yourself, the fun part is thinking of how but first let's work on your suicide letter my man" the darker voice said more calmly in head as it had reached victory.

"Charlie do not do this, God has given you the gift of life" his inner self tried soothing him. *"Sleep on it."*

"*What?*" he thought. Charlie rubbed his temples with a trembling hand. His inner conversation with his own thoughts was giving him a terrible headache.

"Sleep on it, the man can't sleep you idiot, leave us alone and listen to me Charlie" the darker voice said. The voice was darker, more sinister now; Charlie's own inner demon was coming to the surface.

Charlie picked up his tape recorder and hit the record button and began to speak.



Chapter Two

“Suicide Thoughts”

“MY NAME IS CHARLIE WORLEY. I am no one special, I assure you. I do not consider myself attractive by all means and I easily blend in with the crowd. Sometimes being invisible has its advantages. I am 35 years old, single and overweight. In my high school days, I was the token superstar for the school’s basketball team, “The Trojans.” I had hopes of obtaining a scholarship but an unfortunate car accident prevented such hopes. I could not tell you when my passion for writing started. I just picked up a pen one day and started writing and have been making a living at it even since.

I could not tell you when I received writer’s block but one day, all creativity just drained from my body, all zest for life and writing gone. My publisher, Maureen has been a trooper and I know her patience with me is running thin. I have six months to come up with a best seller or I will be dropped, just like that, the country’s best mystery novelist and I am being dropped. It is just typical, one day you are the superstar and tomorrow you are a loser.

The fact I cannot sleep does not help my situation either. My doctor thinks I have insomnia. I spend my nights either staring at a blank word document on my laptop or bored out of my mind staring at mindless commercials at the wee hours of the night. I told Maureen that I was packing up my things and heading to my Vermont cabin in the woods, just on the outskirts of Montpelier, away from the world so I could concentrate on my next book and find an old friend, myself. Perhaps with the mountain fresh air, I could get some decent sleep and get my creative juices recharged. I can feel myself slipping into a depression, a self pity state I do not want to visit. I find myself feeling sad at my life despite the success of my past books but deep inside I feel I got lucky and I have a nice nest egg from the sale of my books. My cabin and condo are paid for and I have comfortable savings in the bank to hold me through the dry spells but that will not last long.

The night is a different world and it is amazing to watch people from my bedroom window. So much action is happening just feet from my place while the rest of the city sleeps. I see a homeless person sleeping on the city bus bench and three men and two women walking very slowly back and forth looking behind their backs. I cannot tell if they are hitch hiking or working the streets. I really do not care but I am glad they continue to walk away from my place. I see two cats in the darkness by the alley across the street looking for something to eat I assume. One cat has its upper body in the trash can and I can see clearly its tail wiggling in the air. The trash can crashes to the ground making a loud clanking noise and the cats run away frightened and hissing as they run from the sudden noise. I noticed the homeless person sleeping is unaffected by the commotion and the lights in the house next to the alleyway do not turn on. Everyone continues to sleep in this city all except me. I cannot help but find a smile appearing on my face, the cats amuse me. I am not easy to entertain at 3am in the morning. I am glad I am going away for a while. Maureen said she would stop by my place from time to time to check everything and pick up my mail for me so I was all set." Charlie clicks off the tape recorder.

"That sounded pretty good not a suicide letter to me. Charlie you are being too hard on yourself. Look at what you have accomplished in your life, give yourself a break" his inner voice says in a victorious voice, the negative side of him nowhere to be heard, Charlie Worley won this round of depression once again as all bad thoughts once again gone and with no help from any anti-depressant medication, another accomplishment for Charlie.

He lay down on his bed shirtless and felt his lumpy chest. I will get in shape one of these days but at this moment in my life I just don't care, he thought. He told Maureen that she had to use the old photograph of him for his next book, there was no way in hell, he wanted his fans to see Charlie Worley overweight. Boy, did he gain weight, what a shame. Charlie could hear those mindless comments already.

Charlie thoughts begin to race again but at least not on a suicidal level and a different voice emerged.

"I am alone. I wish I had someone in my life to spend my time with. I closed my eyes and think of what it would be like to have someone at my side. I am waiting for sleep to take over but I have a feeling this is going to be one of those long nights my eyes wide awake as ever" a whiney depressed voice said.

Charlie knew he would catch up on his sleep the next day taking power snoozes but wanted to sleep like a normal person for a change. A movement in the room is heard, shuffling of feet in the darkness shaking Charlie from inner conversation with himself. He opens his eyes and for a split second he saw someone very fast moving in the darkness or did he? He turns on the night stand lamp and the shadows are replaced with objects and belongings in his bedroom; no one was in sight. There was no one in the room, just a dresser with a few books on the top of the dresser and a pile of clothes he washed but did not bother to put away yet, no mystery night visitors in sight. He turned the light off and lay back down on his bed. He closed his eyes again and this time with the grace of God, sleep finally overtakes him as his body falls into a wondrous needed slumber.

Chapter Three

“Escaping the Halloween Spirit”

MAUREEN SANDERS SAT IN HER LIVING ROOM in her two townhouse in the city. Her husband Jake was in bed snoring away. As he got older, he got louder but she loved him just the same. She could not sleep and made herself a cup of tea and was reading a chapter of “Project Appleton” a novel by Charles Worley.

“Poor character development and weak story line” Maureen thought to herself.

“Perhaps, Charlie should read this book if he wants to get to sleep because it is doing a number on me” Maureen thought to herself then let out a soft chuckle at her own joke.

She knew Charlie had talent and he was her best client but she also knew “Project Appleton” was crap and the only reason it was a bestseller because of his fan base. It was like Stephen King can never write a bad book because there would always be fans to buy the book. She also knew sales could be better and the book was only on the bestseller list for one week. The word must have got out quick and the sales dropped. She looked at his picture and her smile turned into a frown. He had gained so much weight and he was in a slump. If he did not turn out a best seller soon, she would have no choice to drop him. At this point, she didn’t care if he wrote something like “Project Appleton” as long it sells for more than just a weekend. She is no critic just a publisher, she was interested in sales. She placed the book down on the night stand and picked up her cup of tea. She blew slightly into the cup to cool it down, took a sip then returned the cup to the saucer on the table.

She knew her client was in trouble, her friend. She stared into the empty room thinking and wondering. He is going into a depression and if he doesn't snap out of it soon, he will lose everything. Something was eating at him and she could not put her finger on it. She was good at these intuition feelings especially when you raised three children. This 52 year old woman was no fool. She always knew people that were close to her were in trouble or things were just not right in their lives. Charlie was heading up to the cabin this weekend and even though she would miss his company from time to time, being away from the city for six months would do his career and his soul good. She just hoped in six months, Charlie would generate a best seller.

The next morning Charlie packed his car and headed out for the cabin. He stopped by a local 7-11 store on his way out of the city. He saw a young black woman, must have been in her middle 30's, dirty and sweating. She was talking to herself walking back and forth by the telephone booth. She scratched her crotch then her matted hair. She was toothless also and worn an unattractive skirt that looked like something out of an Austin Powers movie. Her blouse was pink but looked brown with dirt and sweat. He was dreading walking by her but had no choice if he was going to get inside.

"Mister... Mister... please, can you spare some change, please God Bless you Sir, please" the black woman pleaded.

"No, No! I have no change, go away old woman" Charlie snapped.

"Please Mister, one dollar, one dollar, please, 25 cents, anything, I need to feed me babies" the black woman lied and she thought of it quick.

"Babies, Jesus Christ what a line" Charlie thought as he marched by her.

"Good morning sir" the young handsome man said behind the counter.

"You know you got some old pan handler out there bugging your customers, you should do something about it" Charlie snarled.

The young man cheerful smile faded from the barking customer. Charlie felt bad wiping off the young man's smile from his face. Why did he snap at the boy? Was it really the old woman or was it the fact he was young, handsome, and slim, a glimpse of his former self. He poured himself a cup of coffee for the long drive and bought a bag of chocolate donuts. He could tell the clerk felt uneasy with him.

"I am sorry sir, I am going to tell my manager about the woman out front" the clerk with the dirty blonde hair said meekly.

Charlie said nothing as he pulled out his debit card and handed it to the young man for his purchase. The young man looked at his card like he was seeing a bank debit card for the first time.

"Is there a problem" Charlie declared.

The clerk snapped out of his trance and shook his head "No" and quickly swiped his card and completed his sale. The clerk nervously returned his debit card back along with his receipt.

Charlie ripped a piece of the wrapper on the package of chocolate donuts. He was waving the wrapper in front of the clerk's face. He dropped the wrapper on the floor right in the front of the clerk eager for a response. He purposely stared at the clerk waiting for a comment.

The clerk rolled his eyes and bit his tongue and managed to say with difficulty, *"Have a nice day sir."*

Charlie walked out of the store holding onto his coffee and was about to take a mini chocolate donut in his mouth as he held the package. The homeless woman caught his attention sitting on the floor begging for a dime, a quarter, anything as people walked by her ignoring her. What a poor excuse for a human

being he thought bitterly. He opened his mouth ready to devour the helpless donut then looked at the woman again.

“Jesus Christ” he declared under his breath, guilt finally sitting in.

Without a word he tossed the package of mini chocolate donuts to the woman. The black woman was startled as the package bounced off her chest, a donut rolling on the dirty cement sidewalk. The woman cradled the package like a life saver and grabbed the runaway mini donut and stuffed it in her mouth dirt and all.

“Oh thank you sir, God Bless you, God Bless you Sir!” the homeless black woman said.

Charlie said nothing and opened his car door to begin the long journey to his summer cabin. Six months away from the city, the homeless, the traffic, the noise, the stress, was becoming more attractive to him by the moment. He put his car in reverse and slammed on his brakes as three children ran by his car giggling in a ghost outfit, a witch, and cowboy outfit. Charlie sticks his head out of the window yelling at the youth.

“You damn kids, watch where you’re going for God’s Sake! Do you want to get hit!!?” No response from the children as they keep on running to their destination. *“Halloween is a week away, why are these damn kids dressing up now”* Charlie wondered.

“They are kids, remember what it was like when you were their age?” an inner voice speaks to Charlie.

“I hate Halloween” Charlie says out loud.

His words must have upset the Gods of the Halloween Spirit because at that moment his coffee cup collapsed spilling coffee on his lap. *“God Dam-nit”* Charlie screamed looking at his pants more upset as he had a long drive ahead with no morning caffeine. His car was still in the parking lot of 7-11, half in the parking spot and half out just sitting there with the engine idling.

He hesitated to go back in the store after he treated the clerk so badly but then decides he is going to. He goes to park back in his parking spot when his eyes locked on the homeless black woman, a woman with nothing to her name sat on that sidewalk staring at him, Charlie Worley, the writer, laughing at him hysterically. Half eaten crumbs of donuts were spilling out of her mouth as she bellowed with laughter. This bitch was having the time of her life; life was good to her, laughing up a storm, really belly aches. He sighed and pulled out of the parking lot. He thought of flipping her off but in afterthought realized he had it coming.

Chapter Four

“Vermont”

THE TOWN OF MONTPELIER, VERMONT was also going to be the future home to Michael and Blake Anderson. Montpelier, the nation's smallest capital city in the country was a town that you either loved the small town life or hated it. Centrally located in the State of Vermont, it is no wonder the city was proclaimed as the state's capital. Despite a densely built-up urban core, Montpelier is endowed with abundant open spaces. Much of this open area is on the periphery of the City, such as upper Elm Street, outer Terrace Street, Town Hill Road and Barre Street. These open areas in large part define the urban core of this fine town, which appealed to Native New Yorkers Michael and Blake to leave the city life and embrace the small town life in which Vermont provided.

Michael being a novelist was giving long time household names such as Stephen King and Charlie Worley a run for their money as he was best known for his “Nightmare” series which went number one on the best sellers list for four months in a row. Blake was a real estate agent which made his fortune selling houses, which was a difficult feat to do in the big city with competition at every corner. *“If I can sell in New York, I can make it in Vermont, and if the state runs out of real estate properties to sell, then I will simply concentrate on interstate opportunities”* he would joke a lot to Michael.

“We can do this Michael” Blake would assure him. *“Vermont is the perfect place for you to be inspired with its green hills and trees, and butterflies and birds singing in the morning.”*

“What about the snow Blake?” Michael asked.

"What about the damn snow?" Blake replied puzzled.

You think it snows badly in New York, wait till you get a taste of Vermont snow, it's like being in a white Hell!" Michael said refusing to digest moving to the maple state.

"Think of Christmas and snowmen and snowball fights, and skiing!" "Think of no traffic, no crime, no smog, clear air, fresh air, air that you welcome into your lungs with a deep breath, not coughing you head off because you feel like you are stuck in the Lincoln tunnel with all that gas fumes!" Blake cheerfully replied with a wicked grin.

In the end, Blake convinced Michael to move to Vermont, he always had a way with words and always looking at the brighter side of life. Then one day, they did it, they sold their house in Glen Head and made a quite a profitable gain in the transaction. Michael argued with his agent, that this was the best thing for him to come up with the next addition to his "Nightmare" series.

"Michael, you are a horror writer, what kind of inspiration are you going to get in a hick town like Montpelier, Vermont? How are you going to continue these stories being surrounded by poppy fields and butterflies? What about your contacts here Michael? Part of this business is networking, getting your face out there, people to see you, they are interested, they want to know what the next novel from Michael Anderson is all about?" his agent would argue with him more than on one occasion. In the end her efforts were futile; Michael and Blake had made up their minds.

In a last effort, Michael's agent Maureen Sanders blurted out, *"Michael you are gay! How do you think you and Blake are going to be accepted in a small town America?"* Michael stood there staring at himself in the wall mirror of Maureen's office downtown. He saw himself, a young handsome man, tall and slender and fit, hair slightly turning gray but coming in nicely, the Steve Martin look for sure. He saw Maureen sitting behind her desk in her chair with the view of the Big Apple behind here. He gave some thought to her words and it was true they were gay and a lot could happen to them. He saw himself in the mirror now not a young slender man but an old man, beaten up, clothes torn like he was in a vicious fight. He saw blood dripping down his forehead and what appeared to be a wound from a blow. He closed his eyes and reopened them again and the vision was gone, Maureen was still there and he was still in New York and he was his old self again, the horrid vision of a future self or potential self now gone from his sight.

"I am waiting for an answer Michael, how are you going to handle yourself in small town America? You could get killed; those people are hillbillies, hicks for Christ's sake!" Maureen said with conviction. Michael turned around sharply and Maureen saw the expression on his face and immediately became quiet.

"Those people are everyone Maureen, don't you think New York does not have hate crimes! I am 35 years old; those days of a scared school boy are over. Blake and I live our lives the best we can and we watch ourselves. Don't you think I know there are people out there I never met who would rather see me die just because I am gay? I don't live a lie, I don't lie to myself and I don't lie to my readers, my fans, everyone knows me." Michael explained.

"My point exactly, you don't have to ride in town with a big rainbow flag for people to know you are gay and even if you are both discreet. You are too famous for small town life, everyone will know and to be frank, that scares the hell out of me. I am sorry, okay, I said it. I am scared, scared for you. People are crazy Michael darling. I know you got the witch hunt thing with the Pope and there are those who rather dump you on a desert island somewhere in the Pacific but I am concerned. You are not just a client to me Michael. You know how I feel about you and Blake; you are like family to me. You are my friend" Maureen said with a tears forming in her eyes.

Michael walked over to Maureen as she stood up and looked out the window of her office overseeing the city's skyscrapers. Her hands were folded discipline-like behind her back and she finally said in a low whisper.

"I do not want you to go" Maureen said flatly.

Michael put an arm on her shoulder and said, *"I will miss you too Maureen"* She turned around all red faced with tears as she wiped her tears away slightly irritated at herself for showing signs of weakness.

"That does not mean I do not get a weekly report on your progress! Damn-nit I am still your agent" Maureen declared in her authoritative voice.

"Every Friday night Maureen, I will be in touched and I will give you an update where I am at, okay? Besides I hear Charlie Worley the old lush is making a comeback, I need to have myself a bestseller." Michael said with an impish boyish smirk.

“Hey Charlie Worley is not a lush and you better watch yourself, he will be on top again. Why? Because he has me as his agent!” Maureen said with her fists on her hips making a Superman pose to show Michael she meant business.

“You are a double agent Maureen, I should be your only client” he said with a smile in his voice.

“It doesn’t work that way baby but I love you anyway” Maureen returned the comment with the same smile in her voice.

They both hugged like two high school lovers and said their good-byes. Michael knew this would not be a final farewell but for some reason in the gut of his stomach, he felt like it was. Maureen called out to Michael as he reached the door and he stopped and looked at her hoping she would say something to change his mind. There was an awkward silence for a moment or two and Maureen was going to pull some negotiation tactic to keep him in New York but the only words she could mutter was *“Happy Halloween.”* Michael smiled and left his office not saying a word.

Blake did not have a problem at all. He made some contacts with clients and his referrals and updated his website. His co-workers were not as emotional as Michael’s, some even seemed glad. Blake gave his half smile to his co workers knowing they could not wait to dive into his client base before he even stepped off the elevator. He took the brochure of Montpelier, Vermont out of his briefcase and fished out his pen out of his pocket jacket. He pulled the cap of the pen off, holding it in his teeth as he circled the address on Elm Street, a place that soon will be Michael’s and his home if the stars are shining down upon them.

Chapter Five

“Death Reminders”

KATIE AND HER MOTHER WERE SHOPPING across the street at a local establishment from Michael’s office downtown Manhattan... Katie, aged nine looked up at Barbara, her mother with adorning eyes and she looked down at her lovingly. She handed her the teddy bear with red ribbons after carefully pulling off the price tag. She thanked the teen aged clerk for her service and took the receipt for her purchase and stuffed it in her purse. She took her purse from the counter and swung it over her shoulder and reached down to take her daughter’s hand. She continued to browse through the store looking at blouses with various colors. Katie was also tagging along amused at her new play mate with red ribbons. Across from the aisle of the clothes, there was a rack of stuff animals, tigers, lions, and of course, bears. She saw duplicate teddies with red ribbons but she also saw one by all its lonesome, a teddy bear with a black witch’s hat. *“Oh what wonderful playmate for her new teddy bear and these two will be a perfect match!”* She stepped closer to the shelf and felt her mother’s hand grab her hand firmly. *“Katie, honey, stay close to Mommy, okay?”*

“Mommy, look at the Halloween teddy bear, can I have her too?” Katie pleaded.

“Honey, Mommy already got you the girl teddy bear” Barbara said.

“But Mommy” Katie insisted.

“Be a good girl Katie, let Mommy finish looking at these blouses and we will both get some lunch, okay?”

"If Daddy was here, he would let me have her without any fuss" the little girl pouted.

Barbara dropped the blouse she was holding admiring and looked down at her daughter, at complete shock at her daughter's words. Her husband has been dead now for the last year, another countless victim on the War on Terror, thank you very much Mr. President Bush. Her eyes instantly swelled with tears, her daughter's words were so harsh. Brad had been fighting for the liberation of the Iraq people something the Bush Administration thought was necessary to secure America. She was proud of Brad and he was proud to serve his country. He promised Barbara that he would miss her and Katie but assured he would be home for Christmas by next year. He was killed by stopping to help a wounded woman. She was rigged with explosives and when he and his platoon stopped their truck to help her; that is when she said something about Allah and she was blown up taking out Brad and two other young men. Women suicide bombers were a new trend starting in Iraq and it became difficult to determine who needed help and who the enemy was. She thought of the life they could have had, and burst into tears. She felt a tug on her dress and saw Katie looking up at her.

"I am sorry Mommy; I did not mean to make you cry. I do not have to have another teddy; I won't even ask Santa okay? Please do not cry" Katie said with great remorse in her voice.

"I am fine honey, I miss Daddy too." Barbara picked up the blouse and placed it back on the rack. *"Let's go get some lunch"* she said wiping the tears away from her eyes.

Blake was completely astounded at New Yorkers sometimes. He waved down a cab and as the cab pulled next to the curb, an old lady cut in front of him and stole his cab. What was he suppose to do? Tackle her? Cuss her out? He just sighed and waved his arm up trying to wave down another cab. At the rate he was going he was never going to get home to Glen Head. A striking woman with a young child with a teddy bear with red ribbons caught his eye. He smiled at them feeling a little sad that he and Michael could not adopt. He wondered what it would be like to be a parent, to watch a child grow, to have someone remember you when you die. The little girl, in addition to the teddy bear had a Halloween themed lollipop and a ball with the picture of a happy jack o lantern on the ball. She went to unwrapped the candy when she dropped the ball. The mother was buying a hot dog from a street vendor completely unaware of what was going on with her daughter.

Blake shouted out at her but in New York City such attempts were useless. As soon you opened a door and stepped out on the streets of New York, the sound of traffic, cars honking, and the sounds of thousands people walking the streets, a shout was no good. The ball rolled towards the curb, one man in a suit kicked the ball in another direction completely unaware the ball was even there. He was on the cell phone and was dodging the herds of people. The ball made its way to the curb and rolled slowly into the street and the little girl was chasing after it. Blake dropped the real estate brochure and darted across the street, almost getting hit by a car. One car slammed on its breaks as Blake braced himself on the hood of the car.

“Get out of the street you stupid moron, what are you trying to get yourself killed” the driver yelled out his window. The street was infested with cars in a deadlock, honking their horns, radios blasting.

There were women sitting in their cars with cell phones, women doing their make-up, drinking coffee, and some at the brink of a breakdown. This was traffic in New York City, five miles an hour. He was squeezing himself through cars parked in the streets, people getting upset as he was touching the grills of the front of the cars or the brake lights from the car in the front all the while still screaming for the little girl.

Barbara heard a faint scream from a man, something not unusual in New York and she turned to hand Katie her hot dog when she realized she was not there. She gave the hot dog back to the vendor and blurted *“My daughter, where’s my daughter?”* The man did not answer and just shrugged with disinterest. His only concerns were selling hot dogs and nothing more. The ball rolled in the street and the little girl walked out in the street. She heard a man screaming and looked up curious. The jack o lantern ball stopped rolling as Katie picked up the ball. She then focused her attention on the man wondering what was happening. She heard her mother screaming for her also and she turned and looked in her direction. Without warning, a yellow New York cab pulled up to the curb heading towards Katie. Katie saw the cab and fainted in fright. Blake grabbed the little girl and both went tumbling to the floor just as the cab almost hit the defenseless little girl. The taxi driver came to a stopped and the driver jumped out.

The driver, a heavy set man from India knelt next to the little girl and the man in the business suit crying and shouting in his native tongue. A hysterical woman he noticed which he only assumed was the mother approached them screaming for her daughter. She grabbed her daughter from Blake's arms and shoved the cab driver backwards. She shook her daughter at first then she hugged her rocking her back and forth in her arms crying her name. By the time Blake got to her, he heard her screaming over the traffic noise.

"Oh God!! No! God not my Katie... Not my Baby!!" The blood curling scream of her anguish was too much for Blake to bear. People stood by and watch with puzzlement. Blake recovering from his fall rested his hand on Melissa's shoulder.

"Miss, she is okay, I think she just fainted" Blake tried to explain. The one thing, Blake noticed even if for a moment was the number of people that did nothing. People still ate their vendor hot dogs, talked on their cells, drank their coffee, and basically everyone was in too much of a rush to even bother to help a fellow citizen even a little girl.

The taxi driver ran up to Blake still shaken up, *"I did not see her; she ran in front of me, how was I supposed to see her? You brave American, brave American"* the cab driver with the foreign accent said with a weak voice.

Blake glared at the man and the cab driver nodded sheepishly and went back to his cab to call into dispatch. Blake approached the woman cradling her baby girl. She looked up at Blake not really seeing him and then closed her eyes and rested her head on her daughter's head. The little girl starting to come to look up to her mother's eyes, *"Mommy, why are you crying?"*

“Oh Baby!” Barbara cried hysterically. She looked up at the man that saved her daughter and was speechless as tears of joy and fear filled her eyes.

“Help is on the way. We got to get you out of the street.” Blake said realizing the mother was more in shock then the little girl. Barbara realizing this handsome man was just trying to help nodded and got up as Blake escorted the woman to the curb. Vermont was looking better by the moment.



Chapter Six

"Hush, Little Baby Girl"

MICHAEL SAT IN THE DRAFTY HOUSE IN GLEN HEAD. The house was packed with boxes and furniture covered in plastic covers for the movers. He sat the kitchen table working on his latest chapter in his "Nightmares" series. He was glancing through the latest novel by Charlie Worley, "Project Appleton" and thought it was crap. Suddenly without warning, he heard a little girl singing a familiar song from his youth,

*"Hush, little baby, don't say a word.
Papa's gonna buy you a mockingbird*

*And if that mockingbird won't sing,
Papa's gonna buy you a diamond ring*

*And if that diamond ring turns brass,
Papa's gonna buy you a looking glass*

*And if that looking glass gets broke,
Papa's gonna buy you a billy goat*

*And if that billy goat won't pull,
Papa's gonna buy you a cart and bull*

*And if that cart and bull fall down,
You'll still be the sweetest little baby in town."*

Michael had stopped typing listening to the little girl sing. It was for word for word the same song his mother sang to him. He smiled and stood up and walked to the front door. The little girl seemed like she was standing right outside his front door. He opened the door and there was no one there. He thought he caught a glimpse of a shadow around the corner but dismissed it. Halloween was just around the corner and knew this was the time of year when bored kids got into mischief. “Whatever” and smiled to himself. He heard the garage door opened as a worn out Blake came in with his work shirt hanging out of his pants. He tossed his briefcase on the table and walked up to Michael.

“Hello Michael, you are not going to believe what I went through today.” Blake said.

“Not now honey, there is a girl on the porch that is playing some prank, I want to catch her” Michael said sneaking up to the front door to peek outside.

“What girl?” Blake asked very tired and stressed.

Michael took his life partner’s hand and pulled him in the direction of the front door. *“You should have seen her when you drove up.”* He opened the front door and the two men looked at an empty porch.

“What girl?” Blake asked again impatiently.

He was in no mood for Michael’s games, not after the drama with the little girl and the drama from the office.

“Little girl?” Michael stepped out on the porch and looked around and turned sharply calling for the little girl to show herself. *“She was here!”* he snapped.

Blake sighed. *"She probably is some neighborhood kid playing a joke on you. I am going to take a bath and get a glass of brandy, be down in a few so we can cook some dinner, I need to unwind."* Blake said turning his back to Michael giving up on telling his partner about his ordeal.

"Blake she was here!" Michael called back to him.

"I believe you" Blake said with no interest as he walked upstairs. *"Until she shows up again, let's hold off on the Amber Alert."*

Michael took one more look and for a moment he thought he heard the "Mockingbird" song in the distance but dismissed it as a trick of the mind. He stood in the doorway for a moment then closed the front door. This time he locked the front door, something he never did before even after Blake's constant reminders. Michael turned off his computer and went upstairs where he saw Blake in a bubble bath with a brandy in his hand.

"When did you start drinking again and before dinner?" Michael asked noticing the state Blake was in for the first time since he came home.

"Don't start okay, I had a rough day." Blake said lying in the warm tub of water, letting the bubbles and warm water soothe his aching body.

"What happened?" Michael asked with concern in his voice.

"I saw a little girl almost get killed by a cab today outside the office by the toy store and I grabbed her just in time." Blake said dryly.

"Thank God you were there and did something. Where were the parents?" Michael barked.

Not answering him Blake sat his glass of brandy on the ground outside the tub and put his hand over his eyes. *"I have such a headache"* Michael sat on the end of the tub and pulled Blake's head into his chest stroking his hair.

"It is okay Blake. You are a good man and that is why I love you."

"And I love you Michael" Blake said as he pulled his head back and looked into Michael's eyes.

“I do not know what was worst, the potential death of that girl or hearing the pain and anguish in that woman’s voice. I do not want to hear that tone in a person ever again. It was like her very soul was ripped apart, she aged before my very eyes. She thought her little girl was hit and I was trying to tell her she fainted. It was awful.” Blake now having tears in his eyes looked at Michael. They both did not say a word for a moment or two then they both kissed each other on the lips grateful for their love even in a world where most people hated them. They were lucky and blessed.

“Are we going to stay in New York for the big Halloween party down in the village?” Michael asked changing the subject.

“Mikey, I just want out of this city as soon as possible. As soon as we settled down in Vermont, we can come back to New York for Halloween but I really need to get out of this city.”

Chapter Seven

"Halloween Follows Charlie"

IT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER BUT CHARIE had a smile on his face as he drove up to his cabin. The road was lumpy as he drove over the dirt road but this sure was better than the city. I can barely wait till I can smell the fresh air as he took his last drag of his cigarette and put out the small stub in his ashtray. His cabin was coming more into view as he drove slowly up the dirt path, surrounding with gorgeous trees, covered with colorful shades of brown, reds and yellows to reflect the fall season is beautiful in Vermont. He drove by a few cabins his neighbors, each cabin was a block or two apart. One woman and her daughter were hanging up Halloween decorations in the front of their cabin's porch. The woman was holding a string of orange jack o lantern lights and waved frantically at her arriving neighbor.

"For Christ's Sake, can you escape the commercialism anywhere in this country?" he said out loud. He smiled weakly as he drove by her not once taking his foot off the gas pedal. *"Fool"* he said to himself and quickly dismissed the woman. He noticed her in his review mirror as he drove away looking like her feelings were hurt. Perhaps she wanted to welcome him to the neighborhood or wish him a Happy Halloween for all he knew. Regardless, whatever the woman had to say was no interest to him. He was cranky and tired for lack of sleep and the one thing he didn't want was an unwelcomed distraction to his work.

His cabin was more like a huge studio apartment with logs for a wall than your traditional cabins of today with all the modern toys and technology. What was the sense of going out to the woods and be close with nature if there was no roughing it?

Charlie's needs were small; he had a library of books, a fireplace, a kitchen, a couch and recycler, and a cozy bed. The only signs of modern technology were his refrigerator, laptop, and a few odds and things. He did not have central heating or air conditioning, alarm systems or the other machines that made the modern man content. He did not mind cleaning his own place or washing his own dishes and such. As he walked up to his front door, he stopped in his tracks and noticed a jack o lantern staring up on him with a wicked holiday grin. He noticed there was a bag of candy, a candle, and a note within the core of the pumpkin. He held up the bag of candy and candle in disbelief. He could not escape this blasted holiday, has the world gone batty, no pun intended. He dropped the bag of candy and candle by his feet and picked up the note within the pumpkin.

Charlie my friend:

I am worried about you and wish you find peace at whatever is troubling you. You know I am always here for you when you want to talk, friend to friend, not as your agent. Enjoy your stay in God's Country and stay in touch. Do not eat all the candy, it is for the trick or treaters and yes, you will get them so do not be a grump, I know you. I will be sending you a turkey come Thanksgiving, and a wreath for Christmas so I want you to promise me you will enjoy the holidays and life! You have no idea on how good your life is my friend.

Happy Holidays

Love and Prayers

Maureen

How did she get this crap to me? He gave a weak smile at the thoughtfulness but at the same time wanted nothing to do with Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Christmas for that matter but the thought of New Years brought his smile to full shine, the perfect opportunity to get loaded without having to worry about everyone pointing their fingers at you calling and you a drunk! He still wondered, how did Maureen pull off the pumpkin goodie welcome package when it took him hours to get here? He heard a faint singing of a young girl down the road...

*"Hush, little baby, don't say a word.
Papa's gonna buy you a mockingbird*

*And if that mockingbird won't sing,
Papa's gonna buy you a diamond ring*

*And if that diamond ring turns brass,
Papa's gonna buy you a looking glass."*

He noticed it was the neighbor and the daughter with the decorations. The little girl just walked in the house as the woman looked at him and had a warm beautiful smile. She looked like an angel and he felt bad for being so rude to her. She nodded then slowly waltzed into the house. He then looked down at the grinning pumpkin and realized Maureen must have contacted his neighbor and arranged the delivery of the pumpkin through her. He picked up the candy and note and dropped it in the pumpkin then unlocked his door and went inside to get settled in his new home away from home. He was pleased to see the place was cleaned by the property manager and the refrigerator was stocked with a week's of food as he instructed. He gathered his suitcase and laptop from his trunk and brought them into his cabin. He sat down on his couch, closed his eyes for a moment or two before unpacking. It was a very long drive and his lack of sleep did not help matters either. He thought he only closed his eyes for five minutes but when he opened his eyes, he noticed it was completely dark outside.

He walked out on his porch and the fresh cold air was very refreshing with the bright stars above.

He saw a small flicker of a television set from the woman and the girl's house down the block, a few seconds later the porch lit up with orange lights. The light set went off then on again, it was a blinking set. I should introduce myself he thought especially from being a jack ass to the woman earlier today and file the notion in the back of his head. It was time for him to eat some dinner and maybe after feeling a little rested take a stab at writing again.

Charlie's dinner ended up being a peanut butter sandwich and a bag of chips, a bachelors' meal and just like he promised himself he set off to start working on his long over- due novel. The lap top screen lit the dark room with an eerie flickering light as nightfall welcome him. It was about midnight when he saved the last of his text and logged off his computer. He went to bed hoping his insomnia would not be his companion on what seemed like a very long day. Charlie did manage to drift off to sleep. Charlie, however, was not alone in his cabin.

Whispers could be heard in the cabin as if a conversation from a distance was taking place. These voices were muffled and very distant. Shadows cast on the wall from the moonlight shining onto Charlie's wall took a form of their own. Shadows of a lamp, a plant, a chair, everything in the room morph into strange figurations leaving no shadows from the objects. As the shadows morph into what would seem like specters, the whispers got louder but the words could not be understood it was as if a thousand voices were talking all at once. Their heads were misshapen and hands became claws. The Shadow People did not stand upright but seemed hunched over some were bent forward and others were twisted backwards and sideways. They did not seem to walk but glide across the room. About four shadow people reached the sleeping novelist while the others watched with faceless excitement.

The four shadow people stroked Charlie's body like he was their private secret lover as the whispered chattering from the four beings got louder. Charlie began to moan and move about in his bed as he was having a nightmare. One being glided to his face and rubbed its face against Charlie's cheek, its shadow features making a solid connection to his cheek. Charlie jerked in his sleep as soon the being touched him. The being then hissed and raised its arm and its claw-like hand extended instantly about four inches. It then plowed its claw deep into Charlie's chest, its dark claw sinking into Charlie's chest leaving no mark. Its hand slid right into his body leaving no point of entry. Charlie moaned with pain in his sleep as he grabbed his chest. The other beings hissed in delight. The being squeezed harder and Charlie jerked more in his sleep. A light appeared on the other side of the bed as a vision of a little girl materialized.

The glow of the apparition scared the shadow people. The being attacking Charlie jerked its hand out of his body and flew back into the darkness of the room. The other shadow people also followed suit and retreated into the darkness. As the shadow people flew back into the dark side of the room, the normal shadows of the room reappeared as it should be. The loud chattering of the muttering voices also quickly faded into the distant until there was no sound.

The little girl spirit frowned at Charlie then once realizing he was safe for the moment from the shadow people faded into thin air as quickly as she appeared singing as she faded away.

Charlie woke up with a terrible pain in his chest like someone was sitting on his chest. He took a deep breath and it hurt his chest to do so. "I must have pulled a muscle" he thought to himself. He got up and took some aspirin with a sip of water. He started to shuffle his feet back to his bed when he stopped spooked for the first time. He was used to the strange noises the country could provide, owls, crickets, and such but did he just hear a little girl singing? He went to his window and wondered if it was the little girl from next door but not at this

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hour? There was no one in sight but he knew he heard the girl and it was a song he remembered from his youth. *"Hush little baby something"* he said out loud.

"Shit, now I am never getting any sleep because I am going to think of this song and try and remember it" he thought to himself.

"No, you are not going to think about some damn kid's song at midnight after driving half the day to get to this cabin! Why? Because there was no little girl, no little girl, no song, now get some sleep before you finally go mad with lack of sleep."

This internal conversation with himself worked and Charlie decided to dismiss the incident and went back to sleep.

Charlie managed to fall asleep faster than he realized. His body needed the rest. Charlie did sleep the rest of the night, alone. The shadow people were still in the room with him but they did not make their presence known in fear of the little girl. They were quiet and hidden. There was nothing out of the ordinary in the room but they were there waiting for the right moment and watching.



Chapter Eight

“General Store Encounters”

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, MICHAEL WAS STUNNED at the popularity of his books were generating at the local general store. He was shopping for food while Blake dealt with the movers and was glad to quietly slip out of view to check out the town while getting some food and a six pack of beer for the movers. Two young couples, four teenage girls and a young man came rushing up to him asking for his autograph on anything they could get their hands on, a napkin, a receipt, their palm. It was amusing and refreshing to see life in Vermont was going to be okay. *“Oh I love your books Michael!”* one teenage girl screamed for attention. *“I love “Nightmare Vortex” especially the part when the main character Debbie Carr gets killed in the end by the wormhole in the microwave. How twisted was that, I was so shocked!”* Blushing Michael smiled and thanked his young fan and quickly signed his name on her pad of paper. Within time, Michael was alone as the fans departed star struck and he continued to go fill his hand basket. He noticed in the corner of eye, the clerk, an old man was eyeing him with disgust. He felt uneasy and decided to quickly finish his shopping. The clerk rang up his order without saying a word and Michael broke the awkward silence by speaking up.

“I am sorry about disrupting your store back there, my fans, they are...” Michael said.

“I know who you are and I know what you are. Just take your stuff and leave.” The rude clerk said.

Michael's smile faded and he did just that. As Michael was walking out of the store, he bumped into a woman and her little girl named Katie. *“Oh I am sorry miss, I didn't see you and your little girl”* he apologized. Liking what she saw Barbara introduced herself.

“That is okay. I'm Barbara” the woman said.

“Hi, I'm Michael”

"Of course you are the horror novelist, our very own Dean Koontz in our backyard, very cool." Barbara said with a teenage grin on her face.

"Hi, I'm Katie" the little girl chirped up looking up at the man.
"Save your breath Miss, he is a faggot, you're wasting your time" the clerk yelled at the twosome.

Barbara's face is flushed with anger. *"Sir, keep your backwoods opinions to yourself if you do not mind and do not know use that type of language in front of my daughter, thank you very much."* Barbara snapped.

"It's okay, I am used to it." Michael said trying to avoid a confrontation with the local townsfolk.

"No its not, let's get out of here. You just lost a customer Mister" Barbara took Katie's hand and the three of them walked out of the store into the sidewalk.

"Oh my, I lost a cigarette sale, time for me to file bankruptcy." the clerk muttered under his breath getting in the last word.

There was an awkward moment of silence as the two adults stood in front of the general store watching Katie admiring the Halloween decorations on the street lamp posts. Barbara looked up and spoke first.

"Sorry about that. Some people. My biggest problem now is finding another store to shop at; I am not going in there. So, you are ... err gay. My loss, you're cute." Barbara chuckled nervously.

"Thank you, my boyfriend thinks so too" Michael said taking out his wallet and showing her a picture of Blake. The color in Barbara's face faded looking shocked and surprised.

Puzzled, Michael looked at the picture. *"What?"* he asked,
"What is your boyfriend's name?" Barbara wanted to know.

"Blake, why? We just moved from New York, we are renting for now the fourth cabin on Elm Street on the outskirts, the houses that look like cabins? Very relaxing"

"No, you do not understand. He saved my daughter's life in New York from some reckless cabbie. Everyone was going about their business and he saved my little girl. He disappeared before I could really thank him. I will never forget that face" Barbara explained.

"Wow, what a small world. Let me give you my address. Would you like to have dinner with us tomorrow night?" Michael asked forgetting the unpleasant experience in the general store.

"That would be nice. We are visiting Vermont. I grew up here and wanted Katie to get the taste of Halloween with the autumn leaves and hay rides. Let me be sure with her grandparents will watch Katie and if there are any problems, I will give you a call" Barbara said with a newfound happiness in her voice. Perhaps, she did not need a new husband but a friend she thought to herself for a brief moment.

"Bring Katie if you like; it is not often we get such beautiful ladies for company." Michael smiled.

Chapter Nine

"Nikomi the Ferret"

CHARLIE WORLEY'S PAIN IN HIS CHEST did not leave him as quickly as he thought it would after taking so many aspirins. He decided to spend his morning walking the trails outside his cabin. The tall trees around him shaded the blue skies above and it almost seemed dark. Birds could be heard chirping in the trees and the fluttering of wings. Every once in a while; a rustle of leaves could be heard as a critter would scurry about, most likely rabbits or raccoons. As he walked away from his cabin, the woods got darker if that is even possible. The trail was coming to an end as he reached the end of this section of woods and he could see the blue skies peeking through the woods, like a hand peeking through curtains. He approached the end of the trail and adjusted his eyes to the sudden sunlight and saw the small town below. He saw the beginning of Elm Street that lead up to the small section of cabins. The town could be seen as far as he could see. He saw Halloween decorations all over the town, orange and black paper, blown up ghosts and witches on top of buildings and pumpkins galore. Halloween was just a few days away and soon the foolish townsfolk would have to take all that crap. At the same time, down there was a fresh donut waiting for him and a hot cup of coffee. He took a deep breath and carefully scaled the hill to Elm Street that would take him into the town.

Charlie enjoyed walking down the street looking at the shop windows donut in hand and a nice warm cup of coffee in the other. New York coffee is still the best but the warm caffeine was a welcome to his senses. The pain in his chest started to fade and Charlie assumed the walk did his body some good. He came across a pet shop and walked inside. The young girl behind the counter politely told him there was no food or drink allowed in the store and that is when Charlie noticed the signage stating that next to a cut out werewolf picture on the store window. The older woman walked forward and corrected her co-worker. *"That is Charlie Worley, Susan. Mr. Worley, it is*

a pleasure to have you in our store, you are welcome to bring in your donut and drink. Please do not feed the animals though" the older woman said.

Finishing his last sip of coffee, Charlie obeyed the older clerk and disposed of his drink container and half a donut. *"No, that is okay; I do not need the calories and want to obey the rules."*

"I love your books; I cannot wait until your next book" the younger clerk said with a star struck tune in her voice.

"Me too" Charlie muttered under his breath.

"Excuse me?" the clerk asked.

"Nothing" was Charlie's reply.

The young clerk respectfully asked, *"May I help you pick out a pet sir?"* Charlie ignored the question and continued browsing the shelves and pets in various cages.

"Excuse me, Mr. Worley? We are having a Halloween special this week" the younger clerk asked desperate to make a sale with the famous author.

"On cats?" Charlie asked figuring the oblivious.

"Oh no, no respectable pet store will sell cats around Halloween, the Satan worshippers you know" the young clerk said with a flushed expression. The older clerk stepped forward annoyed with her inexperienced worker.

"Sally!" the older clerk snapped at the younger woman.

"Thank you, I am just looking, getting a feel for the town. I will seek help if your assistance is required" Charlie said in an obtuse manner.

"Very well sir" the older clerk said pushing the younger woman out of the way back towards the back of the store so this very own celebrity could shop in peace.

Puppies, cats, and birds were everywhere in the store and the toys and accessories that go with them. Charlie came across a cage of two weasels for sale, intriguing animals, *"Ferrets"* the voice said behind him and Charlie jerked in surprise.

"They are very social animals Mr. Worley" the older clerk said.

Two ferrets were in the cage, one was a black sable ferret and the other was a panda ferret which had a white head, brown streaks in his body and his paws and the tip of his tail was white. The panda ferret looked up at him with his adoring eyes and pink nose.

"I think Nikomi likes you. He wants you to pick him up" the older clerk said.

"He? Why does a male have a female name like Nikomi?" he asked with a smile on his old face.

"Interesting question, they were named after a cartoon my daughter likes, 'Santa and the Three Bears'. The two baby cubs are named Chinook and Nikomi in the cartoon."

Smiling he nodded to the other ferret sleeping as he picked up Nikomi.

"That one is named Chinook I take it?"

"The one and only. They are adorable creatures but they need a lot of care and attention. They are like having a child in the house" the older clerk narrated.

Kissing Nikomi on the nose he placed the ferret back in the cage. *"Sorry fella, I am writing a book right now and it would not be fair for you to have an owner like me. Perhaps when I am done and if you are still here, you may be coming back to New York"*

"Check your state laws Mr. Worley, some states consider these animals illegal which is purely ignorant if you ask me. Look at what California is going through, those crazy Californians. Nikomi is a special little guy. Frankly, I am trying to get my husband to buy Chinook and Nikomi but I have six ferrets already." *"Six Ferrets?"* Charlie exclaimed.

“Two cats, one dog and two turtle doves” the clerk said chucking at her own lame joke. “My husband said if I bring home any more pets he is going to divorce me so I am afraid I have to make sure these fuzzies find a good home.”

Nikomi stood on his hind legs holding himself up on the wall of the store cage looking up at Charlie trying to give his best “please take me home and love me” look and Charlie petted him behind the ears and Nikomi licked his hand in return.

“They are cute. I should head back home to start my novel, thank you for your time.” The clerk called out to him before he exited the door expecting the clerk to ask for his autograph. He turned around in anticipation as he was reaching for his pen in his coat jacket.

“I am not sure if anyone told you but every year we have a Halloween Parade, it would be nice to have a celebrity come out and may be say a few words to the crowd. It would mean much to the tourists that flock her and of course the town would be appreciated” the older clerk asked.

He placed his pen back in his jacket feeling like a fool. *“I will give it some thought, good day miss”*

“Rebecca, my friends call me Becky” the older clerk said real fast not wanting the celebrity to leave her store.

“Okay, I will think about it Rebecca” Charlie said curtly not wanting to meet a new friend. He left the store and headed back to the cabin. *“I hate Halloween”* he said out loud for no one to hear.

Chapter Ten

“Shadow People Strike”

IT WAS NEARLY NIGHTFALL when Michael was on his way home. As he drove his 2006 Mustang, his cell phone rang and it was Blake. *“Where the hell are you man? You should have been home hours ago dude!”* Blake yelled in the phone. Phone leaning against his shoulder Michael ignored his boyfriend’s complaint.

“Hold it Blake; you are not going to believe who I meant in town and who is coming over for dinner tomorrow night.”

“What the hell? We are not having company when we got boxes all over the place, are you mad” Blake snapped.

“Don’t worry about that, wait till I tell you” Michael tried to explain.

“I do not care if you bump into Bette Midler, get your ass home and help me here at the house, I am not doing all the work.”

“Fine! I am almost home, I am turning onto the dirt road and I will be there in five.” Before Blake could utter another sound, Michael hung up on the cell phone. It rang a minute later realizing it was Blake. He always had to have the last word. Sighing, he picked up the phone and said *“What is it Blake?”* There was no answer just static then he heard an eerie sound. *“Hello?”* Whispers of men and women, boys and girls could be heard. It was a collective of voices that made no sense. Our lines must be crossed and he hung on up on the phone. He turned on the radio and to his astonishment; the radio did not play any music or have a talk show jock on the line but had the same whispers and chattering that were on the cell phone a moment ago.

As he entered Elm Street, the dirt road took him into the forest that would lead to their cabin, the sun was blocked by the guarding trees and darkness fell over his car and the road became pitch black. He immediately turned on the headlights and slowed down on his driving. He continued to listen to the radio and kept on changing the station and the weird sounds were on every channel. He turned off the radio freaking out now. Without warning, the hairs on the back of neck stood up as his skin crawled with goose bumps.

He started to breath heavy and saw the cold air in front of his breath in small puffs. His car windows started to fog up immediately. Something was wrong; he felt it in his being. He looked in his rear view window and to his shock and disbelief he saw a black figure appeared in his backseat, like a silhouette of a person but there was no one there. It moved it arms forward as to grab him and as it did, its form moved list a mist in the air losing the formation of a person but more of like a phantom. Michael screamed and slammed on the brakes and thing in the back seat dissipated but the black mist quickly swirled in the air and twirled in the passenger's seat like a mini tornado and the hideous thing reformed itself. Michael jumped out of the car, and frantically searched for his cell phone now realizing he left it in the car when he had his spat with Blake. He ran and saw the creature fly after him, flying out of the car and up into the air. The darkness was unbearable and Michael bumped into branches and rocks tripping over his own feet as the whispers grew stronger. He had a hard time seeing the black creature as it flew under the cover of the darkness but the sound definitely got louder.

He saw a cabin not too far away; a small light could be seen in the window, like someone was watching television. He also noticed the cabin had blinking orange lights on the porch. “Jack O Lanterns, Halloween Decorations!” he thought quickly and was glad this neighbor had these decorations to give him sort of bearings where he was as he ran for the lights like a moth to a flame. “The dead walk among us on Halloween”, he thought to himself and pushed such novelist type storylines out of his head as it appeared he was living a true life “Nightmare.” The view of the cabin got closer as he ran feeling the branches scratch at his face cutting his flesh as he pushed the branches and bushes out of his way. He could hear the loud sound of the whispers like a freight train and the sound of crushing brush behind him. Whatever this thing was it was growing in mass and getting stronger and he dare not look back in fear of going mad.

The flashing jack o lanterns with their demented grins and impish childlike smiles welcome Michael as he reached the cabin. He ran to the front door and grabbed the doorknob to open it; it was locked of course but he wiggled the door knob anyway. He went to bang on the door with his fist. As he raised his arm backwards to give the door a good whack, a black mist lassoed his wrist and yanked his arm backwards in an unnatural fashion. The cracking sound of his bones crushing horrified Michael as he went to scream in agony and fear. His voice was welcomed by another black mist as it whipped around his mouth muffling his screams. In seconds he was tangled in a spider web of black mists and the whispers got louder. His flesh burned at their touch, burning his mouth, his arm, his waist, everywhere where the things touched him. As he struggled in the web, a face appeared briefly in front of him then there were two more faces and then they both merged into one.

The shadow people lifted Michael in the air as he floated slowly back towards the cover of darkness and the woods. His screams were muffled sounds of whimpers of pain. He thought of Blake and their future or lack of, his deceased parents and the life that could have been. He heard his clothes being torn off his body as the black mist licked at his young flesh sending more shots of pain. The last thing he saw before darkness took over him was a young woman opening the door with a flashlight in hand, shrugging her shoulders then shutting the front door. A moment later, the Halloween decoration porch lights were turned off and Michael was left in darkness as he took in one last attempt to scream for help but it was too late. The shadow people finished playing with their prey like a cat plays with a helpless mouse and delivered their final assault that ended Michael's life.

The next morning Charlie Worley went for his morning walk into town for his cup of coffee and donut. He was happy that in the last few days, he was able to finish two chapters. Perhaps, he would stop by the pet store and say hello to his new ferret friend, Nikomi. He smiled to himself liking the routine he was developing and felt the despair he had in the city slowly disappearing. He saw a young man talking to his neighbor, the only person on this small block with damn Halloween decorations. The man seemed very upset as he was talking to the woman. The woman noticed Charlie and nodded politely and the man saw him and suddenly seemed interested in him.

“Sir, Sir! Do you live on this block? My name is Blake and I am looking for my boyfri... my friend.” “He was on his way home and we got into a fight, I have his picture.” The desperate man holding the picture of Michael took the photo from the woman after she was no help and walked over to Charlie to show his picture. *“Have you seen this man?”*

Charlie looked down at the picture and laughed. *“Yes, I know the man; he is Michael Richardson, the horror novelist. Aren’t you a little old for Halloween pranks? If you are going to make up a missing person picture, get someone who is not famous.”*

Blake stared at the man with disbelief and took out his wallet and showed a wallet picture of Michael and Blake on their ski trip posing at the Heavenly California Lodge located in South Lake Tahoe in California. Charlie looked down at the picture and a beat of red came across his face. *“We’re boyfriends okay! I am worried, there are only four cabins on Elm Street, you, us, this nice lady and the last cabin is empty. Have you seen him?”*

Charlie replied, *“I am so sorry but I have not. I keep to myself, I write mystery novels myself and I usually do not get involved with people.”*

“You do not interact with people and you are a writer?” Blake snapped. *“I am sorry, Thank you for your time.”* Blake said.

Puzzled, Charlie asked, *“Have you gone to the police?”*

Shaking his head in frustration, Blake said, *“They will not do anything until he is missing for twenty four hours but I cannot wait. Thank you again.”*

Charlie watched the man get into his car and drive into town. Blake was such in a hurry to get into town to make copies of Michael’s missing person poster that he did not notice the Mustang in the ditch just off the road. The driver’s door was ripped from its hinges like something burst out of the car from within. *“Crime has no zip code,”* Charlie thought as he continued his walk to town for a cup of coffee and his daily donut. Perhaps, he thought again, he would stop by the pet store again on his way home to say hello to his ferret friend, Nikomi. He thought of this little lovable creature more often and thought once or twice that may-be he should buy the little critter. Charlie thought against it knowing very well he would not be able to give him the attention he needed. *“You could buy the other ferret named Chinook so Nikomi would have some*

company when you are too busy" his inner voice said. It was a welcome conversation among his thoughts instead of the depressed cynical thoughts he had the week before.

As he walked among the dirt path, he thought he should buy another bag of candy for Halloween since the bag of candy Maureen left him lasted only a few days, just as Maureen had predicted. He may get trick or treaters at least the little girl from the cabin four house lengths away from his. Enjoying the walk, Charlie noticed the singing birds had stopped. The woods were still and that left Charlie with an eerie feeling for the first time since arriving in Vermont. He shook off "the willies" and contributed his feelings with the hysterical man's dilemma and the haunted images of Halloween all around him. He almost laughed out loud when he noticed broken tree trunks all lined up in a row like an elephant was charging through the forest. His smile faded when he saw that the trail of broken tree trunks led to his cabin and his neighbors. He looked down the path trying to find the starting point of the broken trees, smashed branches, and crushed bushes. As he detoured off the dirt path, he walked a little way off the dirt path following the foliage destruction until he came across Michael's car.

He was shocked by seeing the door panel flung off the hinges of the car. Metal was twisted and torn off the car's frame and tossed aside like a disregarded piece of garbage. "What the hell" Charlie thought. He peered into the car and noticed a photograph of his literacy foe, Michael and his life partner, Blake posing by a lake, fishing poles in their hands. Michael was holding up a bass as big as a cat. "Son of bitch even got the biggest fish I ever seen" Charlie thought. He took another look at the picture then he stood up looking around his surroundings. What could have done this to his door? Was this a publicity stunt for the nation's greatest horror novelist? Was he promoting a werewolf novel? "If this is a publicity stunt, it would be perfect timing with Halloween being tomorrow. This is just in bad taste, it could not be a stunt" Charlie thoughts raced.

"Why do this stunt in a small town? It is illegal to file a false report, you dumb ass" another voice spoke in Charlie's mind.

Charlie noticed the unusual silence in this part of the woods, like this patch of woods were dead or cursed. Without warning, he felt a sense of being watched and that is when he decided to run back to his cabin as fast as he could and never once stopped to look back.



Chapter Eleven

“Trick or Treat”

BARBARA DROVE HER NISSAN SENTRY renter down the main street and occasionally glances down at the piece of paper with directions to the cabin of Michael and Blake. The town was very charming and it reminded her of Mayberry the television show she grew up on, *“The Andy Griffin Show.”* As she neared the edge of town, the payment road gave way to a dirt road with the modern sign stating “Elm Street.” She turned her car and immediately slowed down her speed to compensate for the bumpy road that she rode on. She thought of her daughter carving pumpkins for Halloween at her grandparents’ home and part of her wanted to be there. She had to settle for pictures, there was a need for her to meet Michael. She turned on the radio and *“Monster Mash”* by Boris Picket was playing on the radio, Halloween was definitely in the air. No matter how old you were, one could not help but get in the mood for the holiday with a small country town surrounded with autumn leaves and Halloween Decorations.

Smiling Barbara started to sing along to the lyrics:

*“The ghouls all came from their humble abodes
To get a jolt from my electrodes
They did the mash
They did the monster mash...”*

Without warning a man burst out of the woods running right in front of the car and Barbara screamed slamming down on her brakes. The man stood in momentary terror as his life flashed before him presenting the “deer in the headlights” gaze in his expression. Barbara turned off the car ignition and jumped out of the car. The man was so close; he surely would have been hit by her car if she was traveling just a little faster in her vehicle. *“Oh My God! Are you okay! I did not see you, you ran in front of me like a lunatic!” “It’s you!”* Barbara said with an amount of star struck tone in her voice.

Blake finally spoke. *"I am so sorry miss, I do not have time at the moment, I am sorry about running out in front of you, no harm."*

Barbara said. *"You do not recognize me? New York? My daughter and the cabbie?"* A look of recognition came over Blake's face as he spoke.

"Yes, I remember you, your little girl. What are you doing here?" Blake asked.

"Your partner, Michael invited me over for dinner. I never got a chance to really thank you. He didn't tell you" she asked, feeling foolish.

Blake's face turned white at the comments. *"Michael, when did you see him?"*

"I saw him yesterday at the general store. Is something wrong?"

"Michael never came home last night and the police will not do anything because it is not officially 24 hours yet. Listen, can you take me to town and help me look for Michael." Blake asked.

"Of course. Of course, let's go to the police first with our combined stories, he should not be hard to find in this small town with their help." Barbara suggested.

Blake ran to the side of the car and jumped into the passenger's seat. Barbara admired his good looks and liked the torn jeans and blue plaid shirt he was wearing, very rugged. Her mind quickly snapped back to the task at hand, turned the car around very carefully around the narrow dirt road of Elm Street and headed back into town. As they drove, Barbara recounted her encounter with Michael to Blake and what had transpired in town. Awkward introductions were made as Barbara increased her speed towards the town's only police station getting dirty looks from bystanders on the sidewalk and store windows as she drove beyond the required speed limit.

Charlie Worley made sure his door was completely locked and he closed all blinds. He just realized there was no telephone in his cabin. He went to his briefcase near his laptop and fumbled through the papers in the case until he came across his cell phone. He flipped open the lid of the phone then frowned when he realized his battery in the telephone was dead. DEAD! *"Am I in a damn horror movie? What else could go wrong?"* he snapped at the empty air. He grabbed his charger and plugged in his telephone. Pacing back and forth, he did not know what to do.

"I am sure everything that can be done has been done by the man or the woman he was talking to. I am sure the police have been notified" his inner voice spoke.

"Yeah but do they know about the car" another voice within his mind snapped. Charlie went to his refrigerator and grabbed a six pack of beer out and proceeded to drink. In seconds, a can of happy juice was down his throat and he opened another can. He took one quick swig of the can of beer and burped out loud. He took another gulp of beer dropping beer foam around the corners of his mouth.

Just yards from the cabin of Charlie Worley was the cabin of his festive female neighbor and her daughter. Mother and daughter were unaware of the horrors Charlie was going through. Rebecca was running around the living room in her princess gown with magic wand in hand, dancing in mid steps like a magical muse. Her mother who was less thrilled and excited like her daughter was on the telephone with her sister from the township down the road.

"I think we should cancel Halloween trick or treating this year Mary. You could all come to my cabin and whip up a quick Halloween party, bobbing for apples the whole works. The woods make a great backdrop for ghost stories" Rebecca's mother said without conviction. She kept on seeing the frantic look of the man looking for his companion earlier and it really creep her out. She did not feel safe and had an uneasy feeling. Mary began to argue with her older sister as she held the phone

in the air not listening to a single word she was saying. Rebecca ran into her legs irritating her mother.

"Honey, go play in your room. Mommy is talking to your Aunt Mary." Rebecca not realizing the tension in the air between her mother and her aunt which could be heard over the phone, skipped gleefully down the hall to her bedroom singing some Halloween song she heard from school. Taking the phone to her ear again she attempted to convey some common sense to her sister. *"Listen Mary, you can take Emmett trick or treating yourself but Rebecca and I are not going. You didn't see his face, his tone in his voice. It was scary coming from a grown man. We will be here if you change your mind."* As soon as she slammed the phone down on the receiver, all the lights in the house went out and she heard Rebecca screaming from her bedroom.

She bolted to her daughter's room as soon as she heard her screaming calling her name. *"Rebecca, what is it? It's just the lights!"* She reached the bedroom door and it was locked and she heard blood curling screams of horror coming from within the bedroom. *"Rebecca! Open the door honey! Open the door, it's locked."* The frantic mother was body slamming the door trying to get into her daughter's bedroom. Her screams began to sound muffled as things were knocked around in the room. A more recognizable crashing sound was heard and the mother of Rebecca knew at once it was her daughter's favorite "Snow White" porcelain doll. *"Rebecca! Who's in their baby? Stay away from my baby you bastard!"* The mother was in near tears now kicking the door but it would not give in. She fumbled within her jeans for the house keys then starting trying various keys with her shaking hands. Her daughter stopped screaming and there was a loud thud. *"Rebecca!!"* she shrieked one more time then took a step back when she saw blood ooze from underneath the bedroom door. As she shook her head in disbelief, the bedroom door slowly opened and she heard loud whispers for a moment or two. As her eyes focused to the darkness, the mother of Rebecca began screaming like her

daughter. Her screams were short lived as dark wispy smoke snagged her neck while other tentacles of shadows grabbed her legs and arms restricting her movements. With a quick twist, her neck was snapped making a cracking sound like someone stepping on a pile of brittle bones. Her lifeless body slumped to the cabin floor. The whispers slowly faded away and the shadow people slowly morphed back into the darkness in the room. The cabin lights instantly came on. A plug in jack o lantern decoration on the counter next to Rebecca's homework started its blinking light strobe sequence leaving an eerie glow on the gruesome household.

Barbara and Blake were in her rental heading back to Michael and Blake's cabin. Barbara broke the awkward silence now regretting this day trip. *"Telling the police, your car was stolen was a brilliant idea. If Michael is anywhere, they will find the car and Michael."*

Blake was very upset and replied, *"What do I do if Michael is not driving the car? He could be hurt or dead!"* Blake snapped.

"I am sorry Blake. I didn't mean to sound insensitive. I just wanted to thank you in person for saving my daughter."

"I am sorry Barbara. You have been so kind driving me to town and getting the word out. I suppose there is nothing more I can do for today" Barbara felt bad for Blake but at the same time she could not wait to drop off Blake at his cabin, wish him luck and go home to Katie. She gave him a weak smile in return.

Blake smiled back and noticed the woman's cabin he was at earlier. One of the windows had a strobe light going off in one of the windows giving that part of the cabin an eerie look. *"My house is two houses down from the cabin with the Halloween decorations"* Sunset was giving the woods a spooky atmosphere. *"Who would want to live out here all the time? Not Me"* she thought. *"Here we go"* coasting the car to a slow stop.

"Thank you again Barbara, you have been very kind. Enjoy your stay here and tell your little girl, I said Hi. Take care."

Blake said his goodbyes, shut the car door and watched Barbara drive slowly down the dirt road. Blake noticed he did

not hear any crickets, which he thought was weird. He took a slow cautious look around and started walking towards the steps of his cabin. He noticed his other neighbor whom he assumed was the other man he spoke to this morning. His cabin was about four single family houses length from each other. The lights in his place were completely off, while his other neighbor was in full Halloween mode with the lights and decorations. He unlocked his front door and called out to his lover. "*Michael?*" The house was dark with no signs of his best friend. For a moment, he thought Michael; the horror writer of the family was playing a horrible prank faking his disappearance. He thought he heard whispers in the dark and thought it was him but the sound must have been his imagination.



Chapter Twelve

"Halloween"

CHARLIE RESTED ON HIS COUCH with two six packs of empty beer cans around him. His pants were unbuttoned and had his right hand rested on the outside of his underwear. There were two bags of Halloween candies opened with candy wrappers scattered on the floor. There was a small special trick or treat bag of goodies for the little girl he did not meet yet just in case the mother and daughter paid him a visit. His cabin was dark except for the low glow of his telephone charger on the counter charging his cell phone. Charlie who by nature always had a hard time sleeping slept very soundly with the help of alcoholic assistance. A low glow of light appeared in the living room as the little girl appeared to him. She looked at him with angelic eyes and glided across the floor, her ghostly feet never touching the ground. She knelt down by his side and placed her little hand on his cheek.

"Oh my dear little brother, wake up. Ole Hallows Eve is upon us and my time on this earth is short. I am so sorry they have followed you here. I tried to deceive them but I was unsuccessful. They are near, I can feel them. The Shadow People will come for you like the others and we must prepare for them. Wake up Charlie. Wake up my brother." The little girl stood up as looked about the dark room as if someone had called her name. *"They are close. They are close. They are close"* The ghostly aspiration faded into the darkness leaving Charlie muttering in his sleep as if he was having a nightmare.

Blake sat in the rocking chair in the living room surrounded by moving boxes cursing the move to this state. There was no sense in unpacking if something happened to Michael. There was no way he would stay in this house or this back woods state people call Vermont. He looked at his watch and it was fifteen minutes to midnight; almost the witching hour and the beginning of Halloween. He almost heard Michael's voice when he noticed the time; it was not hard not to consider what he did for a living. It was almost midnight and still no phone call or any word from him. *"I suppose you can rule out that awesome*

Halloween prank” his inner voice said to himself. Blake was tired and sick with worry. He wanted to go looking for Michael but what could he do at this hour? He walked slowly to his living room window in the dark, thoughts wandering. He almost tripped over a moving box and cursed under his breath. Vermont’s night skies were sure beautiful though especially in this part of the town. Looking over the tree tops of the forest, the night sky seemed peaceful. He wondered the fate of his friend, his life partner, his soul mate. A loud whisper suddenly was heard and Blake turned around quickly? “*Mikey?*”

The room was silent; it felt cold in the house all of sudden and he could see his breath of cold air in front of him. The peaceful moment he experienced a moment ago now seem very sinister as he felt goose bumps on his arms and felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. More whispers could be heard now, he was now sure of it. He reached for the light switch and turned the light on and the voices stopped as soon light filled the room. He turned the light off again and the whispers returned, louder this time, closer.

Blake turned the lights on again and the whispers stopped. This time, light bulbs in the lamp or two he already set up from the move exploded making him yelp out in surprise. The whispers were louder now almost deafening as he felt the air in the room being sucked out. He fell back on the wall. “*What the fuck?*”

Suddenly in the darkness, a man formed in front of him but it was not a man but a mass of darkness in the outline of a man. Two more shadow men appeared in front of the other, some were merging in and out of each other. The first shadow man broke away from the pack and glided towards him. He smiled or he grinned, Blake could not tell. The opening of his mouth was showing the house behind him like he had no depth but a flat surface. The other shadow people glided closer as the main one reached for Blake, arm stretching an unnatural length like some elongated superhero character and his man shaped hand

turned into the claw of a creature with long shaped appearing nails. Blake found his strength and courage as he broke away from his trance of watching the horror unfold in front of him and ran out of the house. *"Help! Someone Help!"*

He noticed his neighbor still had her lights on in the house and the strobe light from her decoration was still flashing out of the window. He ran up to the front door and tried it first finding the door locked. He banged on the door. *"Veronica! Veronica! It's Blake from this morning! Open up please!"* he pleaded to the dead mother of the little girl named Rebecca. He looked behind him and noticed mists of blackness flowing out of the front door finding its way towards him like some demented spectre. He slammed on the door and it burst open and he almost fell on his face but regained his balance at the front door.

He looked up, down the hallway and saw Veronica lying on the floor like a disregarded marionette in a puddle of blood. He saw a bloody child's hand lying on the ground also just barely peeking out of the bedroom doorway. He gasped and took a step back. As the shadow people got closer to Veronica's cabin where Blake was, he noticed the lights in the house began to flicker. He shook his head with his hand over mouth muffling a scream. Whispers. Louder. Closer. Blake turned around and immediately made a dash for the other neighbor's house screaming for help.

The shadow people changed course in mid flight and began to pursue him feeling their strength and power getting stronger on the one day of the year where they had a chance to return from the dead to cause havoc and death. Their masses grew larger as they approached.

Charlie woke up from a nightmare with someone banging on his door. At first he was not sure if he was having a nightmare within a nightmare as he sometimes has. This felt real as his senses grew a little sharper despite the pain in his left temple which contributed to too much drinking. *"Open the door, man!"* the voice said.

Charlie looked at his watch with strain eyes realizing it was after midnight and what this idiot doing banging on his door. He stood up and went to turn on the lights which did not work. He

flicked the switch once or twice and heard the man screaming some more.

“Okay, Okay, I am coming. What is your problem? Do you realize what time it is?” Charlie marched to the front door, open the door a crack to see the man he saw earlier. The car, the disappearance, it all came back to him. The man forced his way through the house and slam the door the behind him. *“The lights turn on the lights!”* Blake yelled.

“They don’t work. Would you mind telling me what the hell is going on here?” Charlie demanded.

“Things. Demons, whatever you want to call them, they are after me” Blake screamed.

“Aren’t you too old for Halloween pranks Mister?” a tired Charlie Worley asked.

“Blake’s the name and this is no prank. Do you have a phone; we need to call the police.”

Charlie shaking his head feeling his temple at the same time. *“Oh I have a phone and I have every intention of calling the police Mr. Blake”* He held his hand out to feel the furniture in the dark. He picked up the phone and saw the sincere terrified look of the man at the door. He held the phone. *“Your friend? Does he drive a 2006 Mustang?”* Charlie asked.

The color in Blake’s face went white. *“Yes, have you seen him? Is he okay?”* Charlie stood there with his mouth opened staring at the young man. Blake waited patiently for an answer and Charlie raised his arm to point his finger behind him. Blake slowly turned his head and saw a black shadow rise to his eye level. It grabbed him and Blake instantly was tangled up in a spider web of black mist being lifted in the air struggling to get free.

“It burns, oh my God it burns.ahhhhhhhhhhhh” Blake yelled in anguish. *“Help me”* he pleaded to Charlie in a weak voice.

Charlie took a step forward then stopped terrified at the sight before him. A man was dying in front of him and unless he did something he would dead and most likely he would follow. Charlie's shadow on the wall from the moonlight in the kitchen window morphed into another shadow person until Charlie's own shadow disappeared and a new creature entered the room. It approached Charlie and reached for him then covered its eyes as a bright glow of light appeared in between Charlie and the creature. It hissed in agony and dissipated into the air. A little girl in a bright glow stood in front of Charlie.

Charlie slumped against the wall and slid down to his knees.
"Elizabeth, is that you, my dear sister?"

She looked at him with the smile he remembered from his youth. *"It is I my brother. My time is short on this Hallows Eve. Your desperation has attracted the likes of these creatures my brother,"*

The shadow people looked at the girl with newfound fear losing their grip on Blake but still handling him in their grasp as they toyed with his flesh and pain, slicing his skin in small sections enjoying his screams but not yet taking his life.

"You must stop the Shadow People my brother. They grow stronger this time of the year and seek out one person to latch onto. Your misery is feeding them making them stronger. You must send them back" the little girl said.

"How? What can I do against those things? Do something Elizabeth for God's Sake. Look at him, they are killing him"

Charlie was in tears now unable to bear witness to what was presented to him.

Blake's clothes were burning off at the touch of the shadows tentacles. The woman and the little girl appeared in the shadows of the mist before Blake's eyes for a second then faded out to blackness. A second later, Michael appeared in the mist of the blackness. *"Let go Blake so we can be together forever"* Michael said in a dead voice.

Blake closed his eyes realizing his true love was dead and there was no sense in fighting anymore and stopped struggling and laid in the grip of the shadow people. “Nooooo!” he yelled more in grief than in physical pain.

Elizabeth turned away from Blake and stared at her much older little brother. *“End this now Charlie. I cannot save him without your assistance.”*

“Elizabeth, I am so sorry I did not call 9-1-1 when you fell in the pool. I was afraid I would get in trouble. I killed you, I am so sorry.” Charlie cried for the first time in his adult life.

“Charlie, I love you. Do not do this to yourself. It was not your fault. It was mine. I was the oldest child. Forgive yourself Charlie. Let me go. Live your life and be happy.”

Charlie looked up from his tears and reached for her. *“I love you Elizabeth.”*

Sensing the change in his heart, Elizabeth smiled and turned and faced Blake and stretched her arms. The room flooded with a bright light for a second or two and then she was gone. Blake fell to the ground free from the grasp of the shadow people but alive. The lights in Charlie’s cabin went on and both men sat on the ground weeping the pain and sorrows in their own private lives. Blake and Charlie finally stood up and both of them sat on the couch looking at each other not knowing what to really say to each other. Surely, the police would have to be notified about the murders and such.

November 1st, the day after Halloween, Charlie drove by the pet store and decided to park next to the store. The murders on Elm Street were already the talk of the town, not the economy or the war on terror that President Bush started. He turned off the radio pushing the dreadful events of Ole Hallows Eve from his mind. He smiled at the young lady taking down the decorations and noticed she had a box marked “Thanksgivings Decorations” by her feet. *“It is all about marketing”* a cheerful voice told his inner self. He went to the bin of ferrets and noticed the cute white ferret was still available. He was rubbing the white ferret’s

head, as the small creature grabbed his index finger and licked the tip of his finger like a lollipop. *"I think Nikomi has found a new friend"* the older sales lady said from behind.

Charlie turned around and saw the nice lady he had a chatted with earlier the other day before all the nightmarish events unfolded. *"You have yourself a sale my lady. I think I would like to get the sable ferret, his buddy, named Chinook as well."*

"Excellent. May I ask what changed your mind?" the older clerk inquired. *"There is no reason why we should have to be alone in this world."* Charlie smiled for the first time in a long long time.

The End



“NIGHT WATCH”

Chapter One

“Running Scared”

THE NIGHT SKY WAS EERIE QUIET, not a single plane could be heard in the distance, no birds, no crickets, no people, no sound just the sound of the car running with a radio playing static searching desperately for a signal in the airwaves but there was none to retrieve. Tears ran down Chad's young face as he drove frantically on the deserted farm road away from the city. He remembered the day the World Trade Center was attacked by the terrorists and how quiet the skies have been since the airplanes were grounded. It was just a strange feeling having no sound in the skies. He remembered smiling and feeling safe again when he heard the first sound of an Apache Helicopter breaking the silence one day and before you knew it, man was in the sky again with their invented flying toys. You felt safe then and yet today that feeling has returned the feeling of uneasiness and not being safe. This time there was no sound in the sky or the cities below but yet Chad had to escape, had to run like a coward away from it all.

He was alive though and even though his heart ache and his stomach growled for food, he kept on running, away from the city into the dark night... The dashboard of the car had a picture of a young black couple and their baby posing in front of a fireplace which Chad assumed was this young couple's home. They were dead he was sure of it just the others. He looked at the picture and took it in his hand. He smiled weakly at the kind faces that started back at him. He started to giggle a little then crumpled the picture in his hand and cried in pure anguish. He pounded his fist on the dashboard mad at God or himself for not being to help this couple and all he had encountered this dark night.

He kept on reminding himself he was alive though and that was a start. That had to mean something, something important, something spiritual, or was he just a punch line at a bad joke that he was the last and he was running to what he just did not know.

The city's light got smaller in his rear view mirror as he drove further and further away from the city. His mind drifted to a happier time, when everything was normal. He would get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work, go home, eat dinner, watch some television then go to bed. His biggest worry would be if his waist could handle the package of cookies he ate as a snack in the afternoon. Those days were gone forever and he longed for routine and boredom not the sheer terror he was enduring day and night.

Suddenly, without warning the car shook and shakes and made a clicking loud noise. The dashboard engine red warning indicator light went on and the car came to a rocky stop. A loud hissing sound could be heard from the hood of the car as he saw smoke seeping between the cracks in the car hood.

"Damn it! No! For God's Sake! No! Damn it!" Chad yelled out loud. He flew the door open and went to open the hood but knew there would be nothing he could do. He turned suddenly behind him thinking he saw something move in the darkness behind him. He went to the car and turned off the car lights. He did not want to draw attention to his location even though he was scared of the dark. Yes he was a grown man but a child when it came to the darkness, a phobia he kept to himself even to his family. He looked around in the darkness trying to adjust his eyesight into the darkness. He made a couple steps forward waving his arms in front of him like a blind man until his eyes adjusted to the darkness; it was still strange to have no sound in the night. No crickets could be heard just plain silence. The only sound was the sounds of his heavy panting and the crunching of sticks his feet made across this dark country side road. He was walking faster now that his eyes adjusted to the dark but trying not to run and deplete all of his strength.

Without warning he heard a sound, his first sound not made by him or the efforts of his body and it came from behind him, perhaps a block away but a definite sound. He stopped and strained his eyes for movement and his ears for the sound again. Just when he was about to dismiss the incident, that is when he heard the growl, a growl he heard before. His eyes widened and Chad found yet another reserve of strength within himself as he sprinted forward running with all his might arms in front of him to block any objects that may get in his way. As he ran, he heard the anger in the growl. The chase was on....

Chad ran as fast as he could, running from the noise, the growls breaking the night silence. His plan was to stay on the road and he would not be lost with the dark woods that were located the opposite of the country road. There must be a farm house or something nearby based on all the crops he saw on the other side of the road. Did he notice multiple growls, were more of those things coming from whatever place they hide to, to join in the hunt?

His mind drifted just days before everything went to Hell. He was on the front lawn at his parents' house throwing a Frisbee with his girlfriend, Sabrina Peterson, his high school sweetheart. They were both were throwing a bright red Frisbee to each other while the family golden retriever dog Shep attempted to catch the flying toy. His efforts were futile and Sabrina and Chad laughed hysterically while the dog barked in protest. Chad's parents lived in a small rural town just like any other small town in America. Some houses did have the white fences and the green grass and some of the family units were right out of a 1960's commercial and other families had old cars in their front yard collect rust and spider webs and some had drug and drinking problems. There was a mixture of diversity on this block but the one common thing everyone had in common was happiness. Rich or poor, everyone was happy for the most part in their everyday lives until this fateful day.

Chapter Two

"The Last Supper"

"DINNER'S READY YOU TWO!" Chad's mother called from the front porch. Chad and Sabrina smiled at each other and immediately stopped playing and walked hand in hand towards the house. Chad's mother heart smiled knowing her son seemed to find his true love. She believed in her heart and soul, this Sabrina was going to be the one and someday they would get married. The freebie dropped to ground and Shep triumphantly snagged the toy and held in its mouth wagging his tail and turned around to show to his master. The dog's wagging tail came to a stop as he saw the two humans walking inside. I guess we are done now the dog thought and dropped the toy and ran in the house after them. "Food! I smell food! I want food!" the humans are going to eat.

It was time to eat but not for Chad's family, Sabrina or the family pooch. Like turning on a light switch all hell broke loose. Chad's mother screamed from within the house. Chad and Sabrina were in the living room when Chad's mother screamed. Chad and Sabrina ran in the hallway and saw the elderly woman shaking her head in disbelief. *"Mom! What is it? What's wrong?"* Chad yelled as he was running towards her. Gunshots were heard and the screams from the neighborhood could be heard. Sabrina jumped at the sudden crash of noises. Car wheels were being skidded to crashing crunching stop. People were screaming, dogs barking and growling, windows smashing. What was happening outside now seemed to be happening in the very home Chad knew as a young boy a place he always felt safe and he would call home.

"It is... It is eating your father! Oh dear God in heaven, what is it?" Before Chad could even reach the bedroom door demanding what his mother was saying or seeing, an enlarged tongue wrapped itself around his mother's waist and pulled her inwards the bedroom while another one slammed the door shut. Her screams of agony were unbearable for Chad as he cried trying desperately trying to get to his parents. What fate

did his parents face? He heard what he knew where his mother's skeleton structure being chewed on being crushed and chewed on. What an ugly sound that made. He banged on the door with his shoulder then tried kicking it in. In his hearts he knew his beloved parents were gone but had to get in just the same. Sabrina screamed from behind him. He did not see what took his girlfriend but saw her being dragged out of the window.

"Chad! Chad Help me! Oh God, it hurts... It hurts... Chad please!" There was one final gurgle scream and Sabrina said no more.

Shep was also barking and growling from the other room and Shep let out a final yelp and the dog was silent. Chad stood there listening to the screams and the noise slowly coming to a close and that is when he saw the first thing, abomination. It was the size of an oversized bean bag chair, round and lumpy. It had snake like eyes that radiated pure evil. Its body was blackish and lumpy and it had the 2 small legs. It did not seem to have any arms but its tongue seemed to work like hands. It was chewing the last remains of his beloved childhood dog. Shep's head was separated from the rest of his body and the teeth from the creature easily sank into its skull. Shep's eyes were still wide-open with fear frozen in time. The creature swallowed the remains of the dog as Chad saw the head of his dog slide down its throat. Where did it go? It had no body mass. He would have laughed if he saw this creature in a horror movie saying how cheesy it looked. Did the creature smile at him with its hungry teeth or was it saying "you're next"

The creature started to walk very slowly towards him down the hallway, tongue slashing in the air hungrily knocking off a few family pictures on the hallway wall in the process. Chad found his courage finally and broke his trance and dived out of the window Sabrina disappeared moments before. He landed in a pile of bushes that broke his fall from the two story building cutting him in the process but was too scared to notice. The

creature howled in anger and he heard the bedroom door crashed open and heard them coming down the stairs. He

looked around and he saw total mayhem. Cars were on fires, blood stains, broken windows, bikes and play things scattered where they fell but there were no bodies. They were all eaten alive. Chad ran towards his back yard and ran outside to the alley to a back road. He came across a car still running with the driver's door open. He went to jump in the driver's seat when he heard a whimper of tears. He look to the other side of the car and saw a young black woman crying with her knees pressed to her chest rocking herself as to comfort the horrors she witness.

"They took Samuel and my baby. Sweet Jesus, they took my baby!" The growls were coming closer. Chad went to her and went to escort her in the car and the woman yank her arm back in protest.

"Didn't you hear me? They took my baby, demons from Hell. The Good Lord is punishing us young man. We are damn! Leave me's be I tell ya".

Closer. Chad jumped in the car and drove away. He saw the black woman resume her position on the street rocking her and she screamed as the creatures opened their huge jaws and started devouring their latest meal.

Chad's mind refocus on his current situation no longer mourning for the lives lost but for the life humanity once had but has forever changed. He stopped a few minutes confident he had enough distance between himself and the creatures. He was panting very hard and had to catch his breath. He saw a light in the distance and realized it was a house. He summoned additional reserve strength and continue his run, grabbing the cramp in his side from running nonstop. The front door of the house was opened and all seemed okay. There was no sign of struggle so there were obviously no creatures lurking nearby. He went to the kitchen and turned on the kitchen sink and splash water on his face and poured himself a cup of water

drinking the water not caring he spilled water on the floor and on his shirt. He went to the refrigerator and luck had it there was not much to choose from. There was a Pizza Hut box though and he grabbed it, cold pizza would be a welcome treat. The date of the order was just two days ago to an Eddie Poulous.

“Wow Pizza Hut even delivers into the sticks, hope you gave the driver a good tip Eddie old pal” Chad said.

He took the two remaining slices into his hand and let the box dropped to the kitchen floor. He held both slices of pizza and lower them into his mouth and took a giant bite. He chewed two or three times then spit out the half chewed food and threw it down. It was like chewing rubber? Was this even real? How was that possible? He took another glass of water to get the taste out of his mouth and he spit the water out. It was like tasting rust but yet flavorless. He was so hungry, thirsty and exhausted; there was no relief to his dilemma. Panicking now, he went to cabinet and was tossing can goods on the ground until he came across a box of graham crackers anything would do to relieve the hungry pains. He torn opened the bag and took a bite and also spit it out. He looked at the expiration date and the box was good for another few months? What was happening?

Chad stumbled into the living room. It seemed like a cozy room. It reminded him of a Norman Rockwell Christmas card he once saw. He sat on the couch, then immediately got off the couch once he saw he was in plain view of the bay windows. There were no curtains and why should there be? This house sat in the middle of nowhere and had a beautiful view of the woods and farmland in the distant. Chad sat next to the window and opened the window a crack to hear any unwanted visitors. The night was quiet once again. The only sound was the sound of his heavy breathing and stomach growling with hunger.

Chapter Three

“New Beginnings”

CHAD OPENED HIS EYES to a new day, the menacing darkness gone for another 12 hours or so. The sky was overcast with dark stormy clouds.

Thunder could be heard rumbling in the clouds. *“God is bowling in Heaven”* he heard his mother words in his head. This was something she told him as a young boy. At least those damn things from Hell could not eat up the sound of Mother Nature. Chad welcomed the new found sound. He got up from the floor feeling stiff in his back and legs and went to the bathroom. Something told him to just take a piss right there in the living room like a freakin dog. Who would care? As far as he knew he was the last. This is what makes us civilized the tamed man within told him as he went to the bathroom in the hallway. He found an orange in a bowl in the hallway. He did not saw this before in the dark and decided to test his palate. He bite into the orange after tearing off its protective skin feeling the juices from the fruit squirt his dry mouth and chewed on what felt like cardboard. This will hopefully keep me alive and he could tolerate the prudent taste of the orange.

He took a sack of oranges and started on his trek once more after realizing there was no vehicle in the driveway. Where he was going, he had no idea. It was an hour later until he came across Wendy King from California. They both cried at the sight of each other both thinking they were the last. She told a story similar to Chad’s. A few rain drops fell on them as they spoke to each other on the deserted country road. Chad was about to offer Wendy an orange after she was stating how hungry she was when over the horizon, about a few dozen of those hell spawn appear on the top of the road. Their jaws chattered back and forth rapidly like it was eating something already but nothing was in their mouths, not yet anyway. *A few more raindrops.*

Chad grabbed Wendy's arm and pulled her in his direction as they started to run. The clattering of their teeth and growls were louder now. Their descent on them sounded like the roar of horses and Wendy screamed hysterically. She was a young girl, maybe 22 years old with brown hair. She reminded him of her of the Californian Dreaming Surfing girls and she was a fine thing to look at even in these dire circumstances. The rain started to pour now and both were drenched in seconds. Wendy fell in a puddle of water and Chad lost his sack of oranges as the muddy waters washed his food away. He reached for her to get up and he also lost his footing and fell in the mud. The growls were closer now.

There was no way they could escape now but Chad tried anyway and he fell again as they both tried to get out of the mud. Suddenly without warning, the creatures were howling. The howls could be heard everywhere not just behind them. Chad and Wendy wiped the water and the mud from their faces and saw the creatures melting. The rain drops were like acid to the creatures. In seconds, the country side was like a giant steam bath as the creatures were evaporated from the Earth.

It rained for another ten minutes until the rain stopped and the sun shined through the clouds. Wendy and Chad walked slowly towards the city viewing piles of goo which they assumed was a creature before the rainfall. Wendy spotted an apple tree and grabbed the apple off the tree and took a bite out of the red apple. The taste sent sensations of delight through her body. With the dismissal of the creatures, could this mean everything else was returning too? Chad tasted some water that fell from the sky on leaves and was delighted his taste buds have also returned. Wendy offered him an apple and Chad took it gladly. Just like in the beginning perhaps they were the new Adam and Eve for Mankind.

The prospect was overwhelming for him to think. He was no one special just an average person that was in love with a woman that did not deserved to die the way she did. None of the victims deserved this. If he was to rewrite history, a new Bible if you will, Eve's apple was the exile from Hell not Paradise. One thing Chad knew for sure as he got to know this woman called Wendy. He saw a rainbow he walked down the muddy road. Didn't the Bible describe the rainbow as a promise, a hope? All he knew he heard birds sing for the first time in days for there were also survivors in the animal kingdom as well and today was a new day.

The End



“SANTA KNOWS WHEN YOU’RE NAUGHTY”

Chapter One

“Playtime”

GREG’S LITTLE BROTHER WAS IN overdrive again, running around in his Batman Halloween costume. Steven the older brother of the two sat on his bed playing along with his brother. Steven just turned the ripe age of nine and was amused at the game Greg and Steven played from time to time. Greg who was six ran around the bedroom dodging behind a hamper of dirty clothes then jumping on the bed grabbing his pillow.

Steven enjoyed watching his younger brother in hyper mode and reached over to his night stand where his jack o lantern bucket sat with filled with Halloween candy from a night of trick or treating from the week prior. He took the Halloween bucket and dumped the candy on the bed where he sat. Hershey bars, bags of chips, and mini boxes of gummy bears spilled at his bed. He took the empty Halloween bucket high above his head like the Headless Horseman throwing the flaming jack o’lantern at the unexpected Icabod Crane in the Washington Irving classic, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”

“I am the Green Goblin, Batman, and I will stop you with my pumpkin bombs!” Greg declares and throws the Halloween jack o lantern playfully at his younger brother.

Steven or Stevie he liked to be called stood up from behind the hamper as the pumpkin holder bounced off the wall and rolled harmlessly by his feet. He looked very serious all of a sudden for a younger boy.

“No fair! The Green Goblin is in the Spiderman Marvel comic; that does not count! Batman is a DC comic hero and you need to pick a DC villain” Stevie protested.

Without hesitating, Steven picked up the handful of Halloween candy and threw it at his little brother yelling out before his little brother could protest further.

"I am the Joker, Master of Deadly Jokes and Candy! You have just been sprayed with my Joker candy gas bombs." Greg yelled excitedly, laughing at the same time.

"No, that is not fair, you are not playing the game right Greg, no fair" Stevie whined.

"Too late Batman, you are defeated by the Joker, I win!" Greg laughed and threw the remaining of the Halloween candy at his brother.

Before Stevie could protest again, Gail, the mother of the two young boys opened the bedroom door to determine the commotion and was sprayed with Halloween candy.

"What the heck is going on here?" Gail demanded. The mother of the two young boys was dressed in what the boys knew as mommy's shopping outfit.

Stevie pointed at his mother and smiled.

"Mommy said a bad word" he teased.

"Heck is not a bad word young man. Greg, help your brother pick up this candy and put it back in the pumpkin. You both know better not to have all this candy in your room. I want you both dressed for the mall and this candy picked up in ten minutes. Santa Claus is going to be at the mall today at 1pm and you both can tell Santa what you want for Christmas." Gail explained. At the mere mention of Santa Claus, Steven went wild and started to jump and down, his Batman cape flapping in the air.

"We are going to see Santa, See Santa Yeah!" Stevie yelled.

"Not if you do not get dress out of your Batman costume young man. Halloween is over." Gail explained smiling a wicked smile, a smile a secret her boys will not know for at least a few more years and was enjoying the power over children that only came during the Christmas season.

"Ma, it is not even Thanksgiving yet, why are we going to see Santa this early?" Steven asked. *"Santa is a busy man, honey, he cannot be at every mall this time of the year all over the world, so he gets here when he can and he will be here at 1pm"* The mall was also having a huge sale to jump start the shopping

season and Gail wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. Usually the stores; would have the day after Halloween sales but with the troubling times, the decorations were practically packed away the day of Ole Hallows Eve.

Comprehending the story his mother told him, Greg nodded and jumped on the floor with his little brother and started scooping up all the candy off the floor.

“Get all that candy up boys, you do not want to get bugs in here and I will see you both downstairs in.” Gail said dragging out the moment looking at her watch.

“See you in 8 minutes and 15 second” the mother said with a smile and gently closed the bedroom door behind her. She knew her boys would not be done in ten minutes but would keep her word just the same. Sometimes a little threat went a long way with children.



Chapter Two

“Santa Visit”

VALLEY SPRINGS MALL WAS unusually packed for a Saturday afternoon and it gave Gail some hope may-be the recession that started in 2007 was turning around. The crowds even though unpleasant gave her the confidence to go shopping. She supposed there would be nothing to turn down a good sale but as long her husband, Jake, was still working at the plant and bringing home a nice salary, shopping would be a normal ritual for her and her family.

Stevie held her hand while Greg walked by her side liked a trained dog to heel at a master's side. He did not mind, he felt like the man of the family when his dad was not around and felt important, like he was somehow protecting his mother.

Greg was always over protective of his mother and did not hesitate to vocalize his concerns when felt his mother was threaten. There was a boy that called his mother a whore at school one afternoon, and Greg without warning was on top of the boy punching him in the face until his face bleed. He did not understand what the word meant but he knew it was an insult and that was he needed to do, to honor his mother and the family name.

As his mother looked around at the “50% and Buy One Get One Free” posters on the store front windows excited to see what great deals she could buy, Greg watched his surroundings, looking for potential attackers but of course there were none.

Christmas wreaths were hung along the malls balconies as they walked excited. A long line of children could be seen in the distance as the sound of Christmas music got louder. She would drop the kids off in line and that would give her the necessary time to go shopping. The line must be at least fifty children in line, some with parents and grandparents, and some children stood in line alone. A young boy about the age of sixteen and a teenage girl in elf outfits stood by the empty throne of Saint Nicholas at the front of the line trying to calm down the excited children.

"You two stick together okay while Mommy goes shopping. I will not be long" Gail said.

"No worries Mom. We are okay, we will be here for a while" Greg assured.

"I mean it you two" Gail said, gently tilting her younger son's chin upwards so both boys were looking at her.

"Do you understand me? No foolin. Stay here. SANTA KNOWS WHEN YOU'RE NAUGHTY" she empathized.

Satisfied her children understood her instructions; Gail left her children in what seem like an endless line of excited children.

Five minutes had passed and what seem like magic, Saint Nicholas, the jolly man himself appeared out of nowhere wearing the traditional American Santa Claus suit in red and white. The young elves helped Santa to his red and green chair waving at the excited children.

Stevie was going crazy with glee as he jumped up and down attempting to get a look at Santa Claus but only saw the backs of adults and lines of children. Greg smiled down at his little brother as he felt the same excitement in his stomach but would not jump and down; after all he was the older brother and had to be cool and collected. He saw Santa Claus very clearly over the mounds of children from a distance.

Santa stood at the foot of his chair echoing out a heartfelt *"Ho, Ho, Ho"* now and then. He suddenly stopped chuckling and patting his belly and looked at Greg. Greg felt their eyes locked and felt a tug in his stomach with excitement. *"Santa knows when you are naughty"* he heard his mother's voice in head. *"And he knows when you are nice"* his inner child voice spoke up. Santa ignored the screaming children while his helpers got buckets of candy canes out from behind a plastic snowman decoration. The boy elf seemed to be checking the camera equipment but Greg was not sure. He could not keep his eyes off Santa Claus as his mind raced on what to tell him what he wanted for Christmas and since it was not even Thanksgiving, Santa would have plenty of time to fulfill his Christmas childhood

wish. Greg was surprised at himself when he felt a slight jump he did in excitement.

His smile slowly turned to a puzzled frown. He saw Santa Claus staring at him at least it felt he was looking direct at him. He pointed his index finger at Greg and some parents and children looked behind them to see what Santa Claus was referring to, puzzled and confused. Santa grinned at Greg and for a split second, Greg thought he saw fangs lurking behind the white beard of Santa. Greg blinked his eyes in disbelief and saw Santa working the crowd once again as the female elf opened the line and escorted the first child in line to Santa Claus.

A half hour had passed when Gail spotted her children in line still waiting for Santa Claus. She had two bags of stuff and a smile on her like the Cheshire cat from the tale of "Alice in Wonderland." She was glad her children were still in line as she half listened to her boys complained about the long wait and was looking over her head at the sales that awaited her credit card.

"I am glad you are having fun boys. Mommy is going to pick up a few more things and I will be right back. You are almost to the front of the line" she lied to her children. Before they could protest any more, she ruffled Greg's hair and bent down and kiss Steven on the forehead and then she was gone.

It was another twenty minutes until the nice female elf escorted Greg's little brother to Santa. *"Is Santa staring at me again now that I am closer?"* Greg thought. It was an unnerving feeling. Santa seemed to be ignoring Steven and was glaring at Greg with hatred in his eyes. Greg shook off the goose bumps he felt and put on a smile on his face as Steven was helped off Santa's lap, given a candy cane and was pointed gently to the exit and given a light push.

The female elf with her warm smile escorted Greg to Santa, lifted him onto his lap and stepped away to give St, Nick and the little boy named Gregory, Greg for short some privacy.

Santa placed his arm around the boy warmly patting him on the back.

“Ho Ho Ho, what do you want for Christmas little boy?” the jolly man bellow out, looking at his female elf giving him a wink of the eye. She smiled and went to the boy elf by the camera tripod since there was no parent asking for a picture of Santa and the child. The boy took off the currency belt and handed it to the girl while he strapped on her candy cane holder with mini candy canes overflowing from the pocket.

Before Greg could answer, he felt Santa’s hand caressing his back and Greg immediately tense his little body feeling violated but not understanding why, perhaps a deep rooted instinct. When Santa noticed he had the boy’s attention, he looked at the crowd below then back at the boy in his lap. The boy had no adult supervisor and this made Santa very happy. Greg shifted in his lap and Santa gripped him harder.

“If you make a sound or say anything little boy, I will gut like a fish!” Santa snarled behind the white beard. Greg’s eyes widen with shock and that is when Santa pitched his back where his hand rested. Greg went to yelp and kept his mouth shut.

“That is a good boy. Santa knows when you are naughty little boy.” Santa said ejecting saliva as he spoke.

“You are not Santa” Greg whispered.

“You little shit! I said be quiet. Do you want Santa to come to your bedroom on Christmas Eve do ya? Do you know what Santa likes to do little naughty boys in their beds?” Santa said then bounced the boy playfully on his lap for the onlookers.

Greg was about to jump off his lap when Santa held him closer to his body. Greg felt horror for the first time as he looked out to the crowd of adults and children waiting patiently for Santa. He pleaded for help in his eyes hoping someone would do something. They all seemed like drones, mindless cattle to him. He looked at the teenage elves and realized they were not paying attention to them either, as the boy and the girl were frantically picking up spilled candy canes and feeling quite foolish.

Santa let out a few more *“Ho Ho Ho”* for show and returned his attention to Greg enjoying the delay. Greg felt Santa’s hot

breath as he whispered more disgusting thoughts into the little boy and that is when Greg burst into tears.

The female elf looked up and immediately stood up and approached the twosome.

“Sorry Santa, we had some problems, I am coming” the colorful elf said. Greg jumped off the lap of Santa and ran to the elf and hugged her legs. The teenage looked at Santa with a puzzled look and shrugged.

“Get him outta here, we got a line to get through” Santa whispered. The teenage nodded, reached and grab a candy cane for the boy and handed it to Greg.

“Wait! Wait!” a hysterical woman screamed from the line. Gail appeared out of nowhere waiving her currency in the air.

“Please, please, let me get his picture with Santa.” Gail yelled as she pushed her way through complaining parents and grandparents and handed her cash to the boy.

Santa smiled and held his arms out to Greg as the female elf pushed him back to Santa.

“No! No!” Greg cried to the oblivious crowd of adults and his very own mother. The female elf lifted Greg onto Santa’s lap and stepped out of camera range. Santa leaned over to Greg’s ear.

“Your mama is beautiful boy just like you. I am going to enjoy killing your daddy and tasting you and your mother’s blood

Christmas Eve.” Santa hissed with a smile. Greg looked up with tears in his eyes and was blinded with the flash of the camera. Santa gently squeezed Greg’s inner thigh as the elf took him off his lap.

“Merry Christmas little boy” Santa Claus declared with a jolly tune.

Greg shuffled his feet in a daze unable to comprehend the confused feelings of abuse he just went through. He looked back at Santa as he bounced the next child on his lap the way Santa Claus is supposed to. Stevie greeted his older brother jumping up and down.

“Greg! Greg! Santa said he would bring me the new Batman video game for Christmas if I eat all my vegetables!” Steven yelled with joy.

Greg walked pass his brother ignoring him in a dream state and stood staring at the decorations of Santa’s Village. A few minutes later Gail came walking briskly over with four bags in one hand and the picture in the other.

“Steven, you are crying in your picture with Santa Claus. You like Santa Claus, what gives” his mother stated not expecting an answer. Greg turned around not daring to look at the picture but looked at Santa again. Santa was grabbing his belly full of jelly then slowly looked in Greg’s direction. Their eyes locked again and Santa winked at him then immediately focused his attention to the next approaching child.

Greg looked down feeling a new emotion he was not accustomed to; rage. He felt hatred, not the type of hatred when you have to do your homework, or do chores around the house but a deep rooted ancient rage that every living creature is capable of feeling if you reach into the dark half that dwells in all of us. Greg felt this rage and this unbearable feeling of betrayal. How could he possible tell on Santa Claus? Santa Claus is good and no one would even believe him over Santa. Greg, Stevie and their mother walked through the mall to the exit. Greg heard his mother talking and Stevie repeating his encounter with Santa but he was not paying any attention. Greg was too busy replaying the nightmare in his head and the words of his mother, *“Santa knows when you have been naughty.”*

Chapter Three

"Dinner Time"

GAIL WAS UNAWARE of the approaching man from behind while she cleaned the dishes in her beautiful kitchen. She noticed that Greg did not finish his dinner and scraped the food in the trash can located under the sink. She made a mental note to talk to him about this newfound form of protest at the dinner table. She meant to lecture him to behave; she meant to tell him to eat all his food if he wanted to be on Santa's nice list. As Gail reach for the next dirty dish, she made a yelp as Jake her beloved husband wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close to his chest while kissing her lightly on the side of her neck.

"Hello beautiful. Your meatloaf was the best. Thank you" he cooed.

Gail tilted her head backwards and kissed him on the lips. *"You're welcome darling"* Gail said with real conviction. Pulling away from his wife, Jake got serious as he straightens his back.

"Notice anything different about Greg tonight? He seemed distance"

"He might be soaking. I will talk to him tonight. It might be some new form of protest."

"It is not because of all the business trips is it? I was afraid this promotion would put a strain on our family."

"Nonsense Jake honey! Greg is being like every other American boy, being stubborn. We need this promotion." Gail assured her doubtful husband.

"Are you sir, may-be I should go upstairs and talk to him before he falls asleep."

"Honey, let his sleep. He is fine. You will be home for Thanksgiving. I am going to make my pumpkin surprise pie just for you. We are going to miss you these next two weeks but we are going to have an awesome Thanksgiving"

Jake, a tall man in his late twenties looked down at his feet and shifted his feet in a *"ah, aw shucks"* fashion.

“And my December 10th trip has been shorten, so I will be home late afternoon Christmas Day instead of New Years assuming there are no roadblocks with the presentation” Jake said in a loud shout.

Gail pushed her husband away from her with both hands in a playful motion. *“Shut up! Get out of here! You are serious?”*

“You betcha, I guess the old miser was visited by three ghosts for Christmas early this year which gets no complaints from the team. Norman St. Claire told me this afternoon” Jake exclaimed.

“The boys are going to be thrilled. This may just bring Greg out of his foul mood.” Gail said tapping her chin with her index finger as if in deep thought.

“I got a better idea. Why don’t I just show up at the front door, Christmas day and surprise the boys?”

“Excellent idea Jake and we can all spend Christmas dinner together as a family! I will hide a few presents from the boys Christmas morning and we can open those when you get home! I love you!” Gail threw her arms around Jake and kissed him while he returned the affection.

Greg woke up in the middle of the night to a loud sound. It sounded like hoofs out on the front lawn. He sprang from the bed to see what was outside and to his surprise he saw a bright red sleigh and eight tiny reindeer on his front grass. Some of the reindeer were sniffing at the grass while another reindeer were looking around nervously. To his delight, the reindeer in the front was larger than the other reindeer and had a glowing red nose.

The sleigh was empty and Greg also noticed the houses around the sleigh had their lights out. His attention was shifted to his dark bedroom when he heard a shuffle of feet in room. When Greg turned to see what lurking in his bedroom, his face bumped into the chest of a man in a red and white suit.

Santa had his sack in other hand dragging the bag on the floor. He smiled at the boy and licked his lips like a starving man looking at a four course meal without eating for days. Greg tried

to scream as he backed away from Santa but he had no voice. He turned to his little's brother's bed and noticed him sleeping peacefully; perhaps with visions of sugar plums dancing in his head.

He heard a wet squishing noise as he focus on his red sack. Santa Claus inched his way very slowly and deliberately towards Greg. The man turned his head and noticed the Halloween jack o lantern candy holder filled with Halloween themed candy. Santa hissed and grabbed the candy holder and shook the container spilling candy all over the floor as he spoke.

"What's the matter with you? Halloween? It's Christmas boy! Didn't your mother tell you to give her this candy?" Santa yelled. Greg still looking for his vocal cords could not speak but nodded his head. Santa let out a horrifying howl and threw the pumpkin container across the dark room, the container bouncing off the wall harmlessly.

"You have been naughty boy and now you and your family must be punished!" Santa teased as he lifted his big red sack onto Greg's bed. Something very wet and foul was linking from the bag. Santa reached into his bag and pulled out a cute white teddy bear with a ranger hat. Santa looked at the toy with disgust and tossed it aside.

"This will not do" he said and his eyes widen as he found his object of his desire within his sack. He pulled out the head of Gail. Her face was petrified and was in mid scream. The stem of her head was dripping blood still and Santa held her head about his mouth to catch the dripping blood, enjoying the fresh blood spraying on his teeth, white beard, and his tongue as he tried to catch the drops of blood like a child does with snowflakes on the first day of snow during a winter day. Santa laughed hysterically, very excited at catching the blood drips. He shook his head violently throwing off his Santa hat off his head and flickering Greg with some of his mother's blood like a dog does with water when the dog shakes it fur to get the water off him.

Greg finally found his voice and screamed in horror. He found himself awoken in his bed safe with no signs of Santa Claus anywhere. It was only a nightmare. He heard his mother

giggling with his dad downstairs to some show on television. Greg reached over and turned on the night stand lamp. The room instantly was filled with light scaring away shadows of Greg's imagination. Stevie was fast asleep as he laid himself back down in bed, closed his eyes and began to pray to God.



Chapter Four

“Thanksgiving”

THANKSGIVING MORNING, THE FAMILY SAT around the kitchen table with the feast consisting of an unlucky turkey, crispy brown, glistening with promises of delighting the family’s senses. In addition to the traditional turkey, the family table consisted of corn bread, cranberries, salad, and pumpkin pie. Jake had just finished saying grace and the family all said “Amen” in sync as they released their hands ready to eat another fine Thanksgiving dinner.

“Gail, this feast looks delicious, smells so good.” Jake mused at his wife at the head of the table. Gail who had planning Thanksgiving the moment Halloween was over was delighted at the attention even though she would never admit to it but simply smiled shyly at her husband of sixteen years. Greg and Steven sat patiently with their hands on their laps waiting to be served. Steven especially was being extra nice knowing the following day was the kick off to the Christmas season. He remembered Santa told him in the mall weeks prior that he should be good and listen to his parents if he was going to get what’s coming to him. Steven on the other hand was dreading Christmas with each passing day and wanted nothing to do with Christmas including watching Santa-themed Christmas cartoons or shows that were already beginning to play on the television networks. Greg’s nightmares of Santa faded with time as he went from fear to anger. He had anger at Santa Claus for threatening him and his family but who would believe him? Santa is never bad. Greg was changing internally becoming an adult way before his years. He stopped playing foolish games with Steven and did not want to play *superhero* games anymore but kept on playing situations over in his head from time to time.

How would he react if Santa got violent? How would he react if Santa decided not to deliver toys under the Christmas tree but instead wanted to saw off his mommy’s head as his repeated nightmares warned him? Gail’s voice snapped Greg out of his daydream as he sat there staring out to space.

"Honey, here's your plate of food." Gail said holding out a plate of freshly cut Thanksgiving turkey filled with the trimmings, corn, beans, potatoes, and gravy. Greg smiled weakly and took his plate and started to eat absently. Gail frown at her son's reaction then forced a fake holiday smile back onto her face. Steven already had his plate of food was almost done with his turkey before Greg took his first bite.

"Slow down Steven, buddy, this is no race, enjoy your food." Jake said with a mouthful of turkey himself.

"This is so good Mommy." Steven said not looking up from his plate. Gail would not allow such hog like manners if company was present this Thanksgiving holiday but since it was just the family, she allowed Steven to pursue his animalistic eating patterns; Gail had other concerns.

Standing up suddenly, Gail happily announced, *"Oh my, I forgot the buns, Jake can I see you in the kitchen so we can get the buns?"*

"You need two people to get buns" Jake said annoyed not wanting to leave his hot plate of food unattended. He took one look at the glare from his wife's face and knew she meant it. He had seen that look too many times and knew she meant business. He smiled throwing down his napkin on the table in defeat and blurted out *"Sure"* spitting turkey bits as he spoke.

Gail's back was to Jake when he entered the kitchen with a bowl of buns sitting on the counter waiting to be pick up and brought into the dining area.

"Honey, what is wrong" Jake said noticing his wife's distraught body language. Before he could ask another question, she spins around and whispered to her husband making sure the children did not hear anything. Gail grew up with parents that fought all the time and she remembered crying herself to sleep hearing her parents argue over her dad's drinking. She did not want her kids to be exposed to any potential fights that Jake or her might have.

"Jake, do you have to go on this business trip? It's Greg, he seems very distant. I know something is bothering him but he

won't talk to me. He wants nothing to do with Christmas. What young boy do you know wants nothing to do with Christmas? I think you leaving on this trip will make whatever that is bothering him worst. Can you talk to him after dinner, try to get him to talk to you?"

"Honey, there is nothing wrong with Greg. If it makes you feel better, I will talk to him before I go on this next business trip. My flight does not leave until ten A.M. tomorrow, so that will give us plenty of time but I have to go on this trip."

"Thank you Jake honey. I know how boys are at this age; sometimes they just need to talk to a man, not good old Ma."

"No worries now let's get those buns and finish our dinner before it gets cold." Jake smile and gave his wife a quick kiss on the forehead. He then playfully picked up the bowl of buns and held the other end of the bowl to his wife.

"Do you want to carry the other side of the bowl" he teased. Gail smile and gave him a playful push ahead and reentered the dining room with their two sons.

Later on that evening, Jake was unsuccessful in getting through to Greg. Gail was cleaning in the kitchen putting away leftovers from Thanksgiving and putting the many dirty dishes in the dishwasher machine. Steven did his part and brought the dirty dishes to the kitchen sink where Gail was practically washing the dishes anyway then putting them in the machine to be clean. Greg was excused from helping clearing the table and was ushered into the living room with his dad.

"What is it Champ? Why the long face on Thanksgiving" Jake asked. Greg looked down at his feet and did not say anything.

"Is it bullies at school? Girls?"

"There is nothing wrong with me Dad. I am fine" the boy lied. Frustrated he was not getting through to his son, he pulled him close to him and kissed him on the head.

"Your Ma and I are here for you when you want to talk. Why don't you go and help your mother and brother with the dishes?" Greg nodded and walked slowly out of the living room where his dad was turning on a rebroadcast of Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Marching bands were playing "Winter Wonderland" as

high school kids marched in rows down the streets of New York playing their various musical instruments. The television anchor newscasters were talking over the music announcing the school band from Flushing, New York and at the same time making nice comments about the giant WOODSTOCK and UNDERDOG balloon being held by ropes.

"Hurry up son or you will miss Santa Claus" Jake yelled out. Greg stopped in his tracks and shivered at the very mention of Santa and then finished walking into the dinner room picking up the remaining dishes Steven had not had the chance to get to yet.

Gail argued with Jake for the sixth time on the telephone about Greg. Greg had stopped playing with Steven altogether which made his younger brother whine to Gail and disrupted the household. Greg only spoke when spoken to and never imitated any conversations. Gail tried bribing him with stories of Santa not bringing presents if he did not behave but that only made Greg more distant and withdrawn from the family.

"It is easy for you to say Jake! You are not here! There is something wrong with our son and I do not know what to do. He does not talk; he does not eat unless I tell him to do. Why won't you let me take him to the doctor? May-be he just needs to talk to a profession or medication?" Gail held the telephone receiver away from her ear as Jake started yelling at her. He may be in London but he sounded like he was screaming from the next room.

"No son of mine is going to some shrink! Christmas is just days away anyway; and you are not going to get any appointment this close to the holidays. Gail, you cannot keep on calling me. You need to handle this until I get home? Do you realize it is three o'clock in the morning here? There is eight hours difference! I will be home in a couple of days and if Greg does not snap out of it after Christmas then we will take him to a doctor. This is my last meeting for the year and I will not be going back to work till after the New Year. Deal?"

Jake waited for an answer from his wife from the uncomfortable London hotel room across the Atlantic Ocean. After Gail finally

gave in to her husband's demands, Jake hung up the phone wondering if this job was killing his family instead of making a better life for them. He sighed, looked at the time on his watch that sat on the night stand in the hotel then lay back on the bed and tried to close his eyes.



Chapter Five

“Christmas Eve”

CHRISTMAS EVE. GAIL LISTENED TO Christmas carols while baking Christmas cookies. Steven jumped up and down next to his mother when she took the tray of hot Santa shaped and Christmas tree shaped cookies out of the oven. She could see the blinking lights of the Christmas tree from the doorway. Greg was upstairs soaking in his room not participating on the Christmas festivities. He refused to hang up his Christmas stocking so she did it for him which made him stomp off in a huff. He misses his father especially around the holidays. She could not blame him and fought back moments of her own sadness when Jake was missed. He was scheduled to be home the day after Christmas and he promised her they would celebrate Christmas then. It was not the same thing; it did not mean anything because it was really not Christmas. She pushed back thoughts of despair and handed Steven a cookie.

“Do you want me to bring a cookie upstairs to Greg” Steven asked innocently.

“Greg can come downstairs and participate with the family if he wants a Christmas cookie” Gail said flatly. She realized how cold she must have sounded and corrected her tone. It was exhausting trying to always display the “Christmas Spirit” when she had a son that was a 24/7 Scrooge.

“Wanna put some cookies and milk out for Santa? It is almost time for bedtime. You do not want Santa to pass our house tonight, do you?” Steven shook his head violently and shoved the remaining pieces of his cookie in his mouth forcing the hot cookie down his throat. Gail laughed hysterically at the childhood innocence of her son especially this time of the year.

Greg had nodded off to sleep at his desk in his bedroom. He looked up from his nap and was staring at the screen of his desktop computer screen. Santa Claus was staring at him from the computer monitor.

“Hello Greg my boy. Do you remember our talk at the mall? Do you remember how I touched you and how I am going to touch

you tonight and your, Mama? Tonight is the night my handsome boy. You both are so fine especially your old woman. I am going to enjoy bathing in her warm blood but first I am going to enjoy tasting your blood, young boy blood, Ho! Ho! Ho" the demented perverted Santa Claus said.

Greg jerked from his dream and stared at his computer screen, a screensaver of Batman and Robin was being displayed on the screen. A cheap looking city was displayed on the screen then a bat signal would appear in the night sky of Gotham City then an animated Batman or Robin would swing by the screen. Greg hated this screensaver; the dynamic duo looked like blobs of color more so than the DC heroes. Greg noticed he was sweating and he felt sick to his stomach after remembering the dream. *"Tonight is Christmas Eve and this is the night we might die."* Greg worried. He felt sick and almost felt his dinner coming up from his stomach after remembering the nasty things Santa said. He hated this man more so than he had hated anything in life and he could not tell anyone. He would just say he was not feeling well and just wait the night out. He would not fall asleep just wait till Christmas Day and Santa would return to the North Pole where he could freeze to death as far as Greg was concern.

"You tried staying up all night on Christmas Eve before Greg and you have failed in the past. What makes you sure you can do it tonight? You will fail and Santa will get you and your family for being naughty" an evil thought came to his mind. He would not stay awake all night if he had to. Greg had felt genuine fear for the first time in his young life.

Gail finished her last cup of coffee at eleven thirty at night. She had finished watching, *"It's A Wonderful Life"* and listened carefully upstairs to determine if the boys finally fell asleep. She wanted to go to bed herself but how was she going to put the presents out under the tree if the boys were still awake. She sat her coffee cup down and pick up the television remote and hit the mute button. There were no sounds upstairs and she had a feeling her boys were finally asleep. In the corner of her eye, she thought she saw a glimpse of a man in red and white suit from the living room window. The feeling spooked her and she turned the television off and walked slowly to the window.

A clicking sound startled her and she let out a gasp then chuckled to herself realizing the clicking sound was the sound of the remote timer turning off the Christmas tree lights. She listened carefully and for a slight moment she thought she heard the faint sound of jingle bells. She walked to the front door and stopped before touching the doorknob as she saw the doorknob turning from left to right. She reached for an umbrella that rested in the corner of the wall next to the front of the door and hid behind the front door as it slowly squeaked open. Jingle bells rattling could be heard as Santa Claus himself stepped inside the house. Santa turned and spotted the woman holding the umbrella above her head and smirked. She dropped the umbrella in disbelief and gasped in shocked.

“Ho Ho Ho, Merry Christmas” Santa said as he narrow on the unsuspecting woman in the corner.

Greg eyes opened up at the sound of the crash downstairs. He heard sounds of jingle bells and then he heard Santa himself.

“Ho! Ho! Ho!” Santa repeated. Greg heard another crash, something downstairs fell down and he heard his mother too but could not make out what she was saying. He felt a wet warm liquid in his pants realizing he had wet himself in terror. Santa Claus was here! Greg found the strength and courage to get up from his bed and walked to his bedroom doorway and peeped outside. He looked back at his little brother and realized he was still asleep. He locked the bedroom door and locked himself out of his bedroom protecting his little brother as he inched himself towards to the stairway that would lead him to his ultimate fear; Santa Claus.

He heard slight voices from the living room as he inched his way to the last of the steps. His mother was no doubt begging for her life and the life of her children. Greg inched his way undetected into the kitchen and pulled out a large kitchen knife used for carving Thanksgiving and Christmas turkeys. He held the huge knife noticing the fear of his own reflection in the knife then looked back towards the living room. He held the knife outwards in front of him and inched his way forward.

Santa Claus was kissing Gail as she lean back in his arms. She laughed hysterically covering her girlish giggles. Greg saw this in disbelief from the darkness, *"It is no wonder Mommy did not mind Daddy going on trips, she had a thing for Santa Claus and this was all planned."* Tears rolled down his young face watching his mother, the woman that raised him hug Santa and grabbing his back and arms as he kissed her all over. *"How could Ma do this to Dad?"* Greg thought.

"She could not you fool. It is him. It is always him, Santa Claus. The same way he can deliver toys to children all over the world in one night; the same Santa Claus that can still deliver toys to your friend, Cody's house when they do not even have a chimney. It is Santa magic and he is using that same magic to steal your mother away from you father" the inner voice of Greg screamed in his head.

Greg's eyes widen as his mother laid on the coach in the living room and Santa got on top of her. Without warning and with no sound, Greg charged Santa with the knife pointing at him, like a bull charging a matador holding out a red flag to a charging bull. The knife penetrated Santa's back and made a sickening wet sound as Santa screamed in pain. Greg managed to pull out the knife and stabbed him two more times before Santa smacked Greg throwing him backwards into the Christmas tree.

Greg tangled in the Christmas tree dropped the knife among the presents that were not there before. Tree ornaments fell as he untangled himself from the tree. Santa fell to the ground gurgling gasps of air trying to hold the blood that was dripping from his back. Gail was screaming also as she turned on the living room lamp and knelt down to Santa's side holding him in her arms. Greg shook his head in disbelief, why was his mother protecting this monster?

"Jake honey, stay with me" she cried. She glared at her son with love, confusion, anger, and hatred. *"Greg, what have you done? What have you done to your father"* she screamed.

Father? Greg was confused and scared. Dad? His father was making wheezing gasping sounds now as he started to choke on his own blood gurgling out of him mouth. He stared at his son with a glazed look in his eyes as the life drained out of him.

Greg stared at his father in the Santa Claus suit. His beard was clearly falling off his face now revealing the man behind the suit. Greg noticed the opened Christmas present on the table which clearly displayed a diamond ring with a fancy Christmas tag that stated. *"To My Darling Wife, Love Jake,"* His father had come home early for Christmas to surprise his wife and children. Greg was simply stunned, confused, and horrified watching the life force of his beloved father fade away. He did not want to believe, he took a few steps away from the ghastly scene shaking his head in protest.

"What have you done?" Gail screamed into the Christmas night. Gail continued screaming not waiting for an answer, *"What have you done!"* Greg heard his little brother struggling to open the bedroom door upstairs crying for his mother. A sudden revelation came to him as Greg fell to his knees in tears. This was the year when Greg learned there was no such thing as Santa Claus.

The End



“THE COLLECTION”

Chapter One

“Cindy’s Preparations”

THE TELEVISION ROOM WAS very gloomy and on this particular Halloween night, the room seemed more sinister than normal. It was an average room. This was the room where the collection was kept. You would always get the feeling of being watched in the room, perhaps you were. You see, the television room was filled with Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls.

This was the house of Cindy Kilpatrick, a middle aged widow who had a twelve old son named Robbie. Cindy was a heavy set woman with light brown hair slowly turning gray. She was the doll collector. She had always been a doll collector ever since early childhood, which seemed like many decades ago. The care-free days of childhood innocence, when did it all seem to end? Supposedly, when Cindy stopped playing, realizing if she didn’t watch where she was walking, the world would trip her. She would fall right on her face. There would be no parents or teachers running to her aid, to help her on her feet. Only Cindy could help herself. She did it for thirty seven years, of walking and falling. Now, being a single parent, Cindy realized she had to show her son the ways of the world. Praise the Lord, he liked television. The television kept him out of mischief for years.

In the evenings, the gloomy television room always came to life. Every night at seven o’clock, the room would be filled with a low glow of light, like a glow of a lantern while camping out at your favorite camp site. Voices of actors would be heard and then be killed, only to be killed again next week on another program. It seemed like Robbie was the square box’s number one fan.

Robbie was a little thin-bodied child who was always spoiled and always had to have his own way, always. He was more spoiled than a lemon sitting in the sun for months, even though Robbie was only twelve, he often pictured himself as some kind of hero. He lived in a fantasy world where Robert Kilpatrick

always won in the end. Sometimes, he acted like seventeen and occasionally you would catch him combing his hair in the bathroom, not a hair out of place, his brown hair would sparkle in the mirror. You would think he was preparing for a heavy date with the hottest cheerleader in school. However, Robbie's only date was with the square box; it was almost time for his favorite programs. Yes, Robbie was truly a loyal and dedicated fan.

Upstairs, Cindy was getting ready for her date with a gentleman friend. She had met him while bowling, she was very nervous. She also felt guilty going on a date on Halloween night. Robbie sat downstairs watching a horror movie marathon on television dreading the arrival of the baby-sitter and sulking because he was missing out on a night of tricks and treats as punishment. She knew her son did not like babysitters and was in fact angry with her but she was being a good parent of following through with his punishment for disobeying her. Cindy focused her attention to her Halloween costume. Being a heavy set woman; "*oh you are big boned*" as her mother used to tell her when she was younger, God Bless her soul, worked on her outfit to hide her obvious excessive weight. She had dyed her hair pitch black and worn a peasant dark maroon dress attached to a yellow overskirt and corseted black vest. "*I look like a Renaissance Faire Tavern Wrench*" she chuckled to herself.. The main thing; the outfit made her look good and hide her unfavorable body parts. At one time Cindy would never dream of putting on make-up even on Halloween. Now, she had to cover up Father Time's handiwork.

As Cindy glanced down to pick up her brush, her eyes caught a glimpse of a picture on the dressing table. The photograph was of Bob, her late husband and Cindy taken outside on their porch. She suddenly did not feel like going out. She should call up the baby-sitter and call the whole evening off. She should spend the night with her son and take him out trick or treating, give him a different punishment. Cindy always became depressed when she thought of her dear sweet husband. It often pain her to discipline her son, there was so much of her husband in Robbie's features.

It took Cindy two years to get the courage just to think of dating. Two horrible years without her Bob was pure hell for her, she had to carry on; "life goes on" she was told quite often.

She still regretted that horrible day at the funeral parlor. Cindy and Bob had been fighting over the eve of his death about something silly, the Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls. Bob loved Cindy, she was the perfect woman; she was everything he wanted in a woman, all except those evil looking dolls. Cindy could have collected sea shells for all he cared. He hated those damned things, those things that people called a child's toy. The dolls knew he hated them and felt a presence of returned hatred every time he was near them. Cindy teased him calling him a "doll hater" and when she realized he was not laughing back, a part of her became concern for husband as she explained to him they were made of stuffing and fabric, nothing more. A game of harmless play escalated into a verbal fight. Cindy called him a "lunatic and he needed a vacation" while he snapped back stating *"at least I am not a grown woman who likes to play house and play with dolls"*

The next morning, Cindy woke up and rolled over to her left side and wrapped her left arm around Bob, despite their quarrel over the dolls. The movement caused Bob's lifeless head to slowly turn and face Cindy; his eyes bulged out with fright. Why was that horrible expression on his face? What had he seen just before he died? Even to this day Cindy still cannot answer those questions.

Cindy screamed that morning, screamed and mourned until she could not cry anymore. She fell to her knees on Bob's side of the bed crying and screaming into his lifeless body, stopping now and then embracing the lifeless body of her husband hugging him not wanting to let go hoping in some childlike way that would make the situation better, perhaps bring him back. She remembered being mad at God, holding onto her husband crying in anguish refusing to let God take her husband but of course he was no longer there just an empty vessel. It took her quite a while to even function; she was so shaken that she could not call the ambulance but knew she had to. She was thankful Robbie was sleeping over a friend's house that night. How would he react to his screaming mother and dead father? Cindy

did not want to think about the potential trauma if he saw his dead father. It seemed like the whole house was mourning over Bob's death, all except the Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls, whom still had their smiles or did their smiles seem like mischievous grins.

The coroner's office had ruled the cause of death as natural, heart failure. Cindy could not understand why her husband had died of a heart attack considering he was the healthiest men in the community. How could she not know about his medical condition? Friends reminded her of John Ritter, the actor most famous for playing the role of Jack Tripper on *"Three's Company"* and he was in the prime of his life and he had died of unexpected heart complications. Sometimes tragedies happen with no explanation.

Bob looked like the life was scared out of him; terror was written all over his face which scared Cindy because she knew her husband was fearless. Her late husband lived in a world where men do not cry. If he was not telling stories of fights in high school, it was the time he killed a wild wolf with his bare hands with the help of his pocket knife in the mountains of Kern County. Something had caused him to have a heart attack. It must have been a terrible nightmare of some kind of delusions. Cindy knew one thing for sure, her husband was dead. She will never talk to him again. She would never laugh along with him or make love to him ever again.

Bob's death was in the past and this was the present. She must be a survivor; Bob would have wanted her to be. Perhaps, she would remarry someday, she highly doubted it. Cindy started to cry over Bob's picture, while she wiped her nose with the palm of her right hand, she became aware of a disturbance near her bedroom door.

A small voice was whining near the doorway, a voice of concern and confusion.

"Mommy, why are you crying?" Robbie said with an innocent look. He was at the point of bursting into tears like his mother. She quickly approached her son and knelt down. She embraced him and started to comfort him, two horrible years

had passed and it was still rough times for her and her son. He knew why she was crying and Robbie also missed his father. They held each other not saying a word but rocked each other in each other's arms. No words needed to be spoken but the communication was clear.



Chapter Two

“The Baby-sitter”

THE DOOR BELL INTERRUPTED Cindy's comforting. It startled to echo throughout the two story house. Quickly glancing at the clock, Cindy realized it was five thirty, the baby-sitter had arrived. She hoped it was the baby-sitter and not the horde of trick or treaters that would flood her porch steps. She wanted to leave that pleasure to Melinda, her trust worthy baby-sitter. It was too late to back out of her date now. Cindy and Robbie walked down the stairs to greet the party at the front door. Robbie grabbed a handful of candy bars from a huge giant black bowl shaped decorated like a vampire located on a small table next to the front door. As Robbie grabbed the candy, a plastic battery-operated vampire hand came crashing down from the rim of the bowl echoing a Dracula-like operated voice greeting, “Happy Halloween.” Cindy playfully gesture to her son with her index finger the candy was for the trick or treaters but Robbie had already returned to the television room, cheerful once more.

Melinda, the baby-sitter was a seventeen year old teenager. She had long blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes. She was a good kid who didn't believe in booze and drugs like ninety percent of her high school friends. She was dateless for the first time in her life on Halloween but was determined to make the best of the evening. She put her troubles behind her and worn a festival black t-shirt with a picture of Snoopy laying on top of a pumpkin carved with a harmless expression.

Cindy and Melinda exchanged “hellos,” then Cindy made a hand gesture for Melinda to enter her home. Melinda had been baby-sitting for the Kilpatricks' since she was ten years old. It was a strange feeling entering the house without the presence of Mr. Kilpatrick around. That was something everyone had to get used to, even the baby-sitter. There were some instructions and a quick reunion; then Cindy excused herself and went back upstairs. She only had ten more minutes left before the gentleman caller would be ringing her doorbell for a night of frightful and blissful Halloween fun. She looked like a bar maid

in her costume and wished she had the shape to be dress like she felt, Cinderella.

While Cindy was putting the finishing touches on her work or art, Melinda was getting re-acquainted with Robbie. Robbie liked Melinda because he knew he could get his own way, he always did. She would let him watch his stupid television programs, stay up late, even might let him go trick or treating a house or two against the rules of his punishment if he played his cards right. Robbie was definitely a spoiled child.

However, there was one thing he could not manipulate Melinda into letting him do. He was forbidden to touch the Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls. He was blamed for the mutilation of three dolls two weeks ago. Cindy woke up one morning and found three dolls hanging from the revolving clothes line, her favorite ones. She knew her dolls were identical but she also knew they were her favorites. Cindy's eyes widened with horror as she focused on the third doll. A photograph of Bob was tacked to the doll's face, for a split second, Cindy thought Bob was hanging from the clothes line instead of the Raggedy Ann doll. The hanging reminded her of concentration camps of World War II in Nazi Germany. A flashback from photographs from a History Channel Documentary and this ghastly display flash quickly before her eyes and she blinked to push the image away from her sight.

The smiles of the dolls glared out at her. The dolls' feet were slashed off. A sacrifice of some sort, the smiles said, as their candy cane legs dangled loosely from the line. For the first time in Cindy's life, she was afraid of her dolls and she didn't know why. The ghastly scene gave her the creeps. The eerie feeling she felt turned to anger at her son for this unforgiving act. He must have playing G.I. Joe and these unfortunate dolls were prisoners of war. Perhaps, Robbie is displaying some sociopath tendencies that will soon manifest itself into adulthood. Robbie could be also outgrowing trick or treating and was taking Halloween to the next level with this heartless prank. Cindy did not know what to think.

Bob's death was still hard on Cindy and seeing a picture of her husband torn up for a prank or game whatever was inexcusable.

It was not like she could take another picture, a memory lost forever was tacked onto a Raggedy Andy doll. Her emotions were racing and she did not know if she should be mad about the dolls or the fact Robbie torn one of her favorite snap shots of Bob. Bob was on a diet and he was sneaking into the kitchen. He had hidden some Oreo cookies the day before. Just as he shoved the defenseless cookie into his mouth, Cindy was there, in the kitchen, with a camera. It was a hilarious mug shot and one of her favorites. She did not find any humor in pretending to hang his father and did not want to understand his actions. Nevertheless, he had done something wrong and he must be punished for it. Halloween was cancelled for him and Robbie immediately burst into protest professing his innocence. But Robbie did not perform this nasty act and he swears to it this very day. Cindy warned him, if he even breathes on any of her dolls, the television set is going in the trash can. If he gave Melinda any trouble or did not listen to her, then Christmas would be cancel. Robbie never saw his mother so angry and knew better to test the limits of her fury. He would come within two feet of the dolls; he hated those dolls, just like his father.

It was going to be a very quiet and relaxing evening. Melinda was now out of the television room and was in the entry way looking in the mirror, fluffing her hair. She prepared herself playing escort for Robbie's Halloween tricks or treats but was informed of his punishment. She smiled to herself and took a Snickers bar out of the Halloween bowl. "Happy Halloween" the bowl said as the vampire hand came crashing down on her unexpected hand. She let out a giggle as she jerked her hand forgetting the fun of Halloween as a child from years past. She torn the candy wrapper and started to eat her candy bar, still checking her hair in the entry way mirror.

The silence was broken by a sudden scream of horror. It came from the television room and crouched on the couch with his knees pressed against his chest and his arms wrapped around them, was Robbie, trembling with fear. His eyes were glazed wide with fright. He tried to speak, he was incoherent; finally he screamed.

“It’s that Raggedy Ann doll! It moved! It..It blinked its left eye at me!”

Melinda was shocked at first and then giggle at the obviously Halloween prank. *“Good one Robbie my man.”* Her smile faded as she heard footsteps thumping down the stairs and she glared at the little boy for his ill timing joke. Cindy ran though the doorway looking twenty years older, resembling an old woman. She demanded answers that Melinda could not provide. She tried to explain it was a joke a prank but Cindy did not hear her explanations. Realizing his evening of fun and entertainment might be threatened; Robbie swallowed his shock and fear and began to speak in behalf of Melinda. He had to calm down and do something since his baby-sitter was doing a terrible job of presenting her side of the story.

He told his mother that he was watching television and he saw a spider and he screamed in terror. Melinda did nothing wrong. Perplexed that her son could watch horror movies and be afraid of a spider was beyond her comprehension but she accepted the explanation suspiciously. She gave her son a look he knew too well that his mother was keeping tabs on his antics. She directed Melinda into the entry way and apologized to her for her temporary hysteria. She had been under a lot stress lately and tonight was not just a Halloween party, it was an opportunity for her to get away from all the pressures. She expressed her feeling to Melinda and explained it was very hard going out and dating again.

Cindy explained she was very protective of her son; he was all she had left. His only living relative was Bob’s mother and she lived in Poughkeepsie, New York. It was quite sad but true, Melinda understood and comforted Cindy; she did not want to tell Mrs. Kilpatrick about Robbie’s claim of the living doll. She would handle the matter herself and plan to explain to Robbie he needs to understand where his mother is coming from and he must behave like a good boy. Cindy explained that Robbie has a creative imagination and she needs to make sure he does not drag her into his childhood fantasies to avoid responsibility and accountability for his actions. She knew her son too well.

Chapter Three

“Cindy’s Halloween Date”

THEIR CONVERSATION ENDED at the knock of the door. Cindy tugged and adjusted her dress and nodded to Melinda to get the door; the gentleman caller had arrived. Cindy no longer looked like an old woman, she transformed into a princess. Melinda opened the door and immediately looked down at three girls dressed like witches. *“Trick or Treat!”* the girls sang in sync. Cindy frowned and let down her pose, let down it was not her date.

“Oh, you three girls look scary.” Melinda said as she handed the three children their Halloween treats.

“Thank you” the witches chimed in and turn around to run to the next house when a man in a Robin Hood costume walked up to the door. The three witches pumped into the man in green tights that was too revealing for three young girls. The little girls did not notice but Melinda did and she smile in approval.

“Aren’t you too old for trick or treating” Melinda said in a flirtation tune. Cindy came from behind and grabbed Robin Hood’s arm affectionately.

“David darling, you are early” Cindy cooed.

“You look great Cindy. Happy Halloween” the man in tights said. He looked up at Melinda waiting for an introduction but he found himself being pulled toward his car.

“Thank you Melinda, we will be home early. You’re a doll” Cindy exclaimed. The man in the tights smiled briefly and gave a quick wave “good-bye” to the teenager.

“A doll. May-be this wasn’t going to be a quiet evening after all. If he keeps this crap up tonight, I will be the one watching TV and Robbie gets candy duty” Melinda thought as she shut the front door and returned to the living room.

Melinda thanked Robbie for saving her neck even though she did not believes in lying, at least not all the time. She asked him again what had happened five minutes ago; the story did not change. The Raggedy Ann had moved and blinked its left eye.

This little chat with Robbie was going to be more difficult then Melinda thought. First of all, if Melinda was going to get Robbie's head straight, she had to shut off the television set. Robbie must have her full attention. However, Robbie insisted the television stay on; he was truly a loyal fan of the square box.

If the television was to be on, it would not be some cheap horror movie, which Robbie was watching. Melinda grabbed the television remote and changed the channel. She stopped when she came across a music video program. Olivia Newton-John was exercising and dancing in a light blue gym outfit. She was singing one her hits from the early eighties, "*Physical*." She smirked at the old format of the videos made back in the "old days." The men in the Speedos were definitely eye candy for her. This was more pleasant then some madman in a ski mask running around chopping up young virgins. Robbie was by now was completely calm and did not put up a fuss to her surprise when she changed the television channel. This lecture may be easy after all; she hoped Cindy was having as much luck as she was.

Cindy and David arrived at The Metro, a trendy restaurant-bar-dance club at eight thirty. The establishment was decked out in Halloween themed decorations, spider webs hung everywhere with plastic plug in pumpkins at every table. The waiters and waitresses rush back and forth to their own assigned tables dressed as vampires. The bartender, named Max was a young black good natured man in his early twenties was dressed as a police officer. His co workers teased him saying he looked like a striper-cop but of course he was not. Some guests that already finished their meals made their way to the dance floor where the judging of the best costume would be announced at midnight.

David had always had his eye on Cindy at work and was happy he made the move to ask her out. He had made reservations for the big Halloween Party Event weeks ago and was hoping Cindy would not say no. He was hoping this date would lead to something to more than just a date. He was tired of one night stands and coming home to an empty apartment. He wanted someone to love and someone to love him back. The waiter

had escorted the couple to their table and handed them their menus.

"Our special wine is fresh blood, I mean on the back on the menu" the undead waiter said with a bad imitation of Boris Karloff doing Dracula. Cindy giggled at the waiter.

"This place is great, they go all out on Halloween" David said smiling.

"Thank you, give us a minute" Cindy said. The waiter still in character glared at Cindy and nodded and walked backwards bowing to the new guests.

"He is really working for his tip" Cindy said then snorted in laughter. She caught herself and quickly covered her mouth embarrassed. Cindy liked David and did not want to seem desperate. She liked the feeling of being cared for, she missed that feeling; she wanted that empty gap in her life to be filled. She was looking for a relationship and she hoped David was too. She was getting older and she was certainly no longer a teenager like Melinda. She wanted to settle down and did not want to grow old alone. At first Cindy thought David was only after one thing-sex, he was certainly impressing her with gentleman ways despite his locker room reputation and rumors at the office.

"Sorry, I usually do not laugh like that" Cindy said.

"It is cute Cindy just like you. You are so real. You are not fake Cindy; that is one of the things I like about you." David said with a warm sincere smile.

Cindy suddenly got butterflies in her stomach and felt so excited and reach over and touch Robin Hood's hand.

"And I love a man in green tights" Cindy said bravely trying to break any sexual tension that was building up in between them. They had a connection and Cindy knew David was not her beloved Bob but the warmth of his hand felt good. Before either one of them could speak, the lights in the club house flash on and on and the stage in front of them was light up with various colors. Michael Jackson's *"Thriller"* was being played as dancers came out copying the late pop singer's hit that rocked

him to fame. Halloween was everywhere in The Metro and the crowd laugh and cheer as the dancers did the zombie dance getting the crowd wild.



Chapter Four

“The Rocking Chair”

IT STARTED OUT AS A busy evening for Melinda. The television was off and Robbie was fast asleep on the floor. She had not had any more trick or treaters in the last half hour and was glad the youngsters have gone home to munch on their Halloween goodies. She purposely saved a few of the good candy bars for herself and Robbie such as M&M's, Hershey, and a few Snickers bars. The last group of trick or treaters got small pieces of candy while the good ones remain on the bottom of the vampire bowl. Melinda was hesitate to give Robbie any candy due to his fib but figure he suffer enough not going trick or treating so they both enjoyed the plentiful of candy until Robbie crashed on the floor in a sugar overload. She was glad he did not want to play Cowboys and Indians or some other stupid game. Melinda had convinced Robbie that the Raggedy Ann did not move; it was simply part of his mother's collection; they were not trolls or monsters; they were just a doll collection. Robbie had been watching a horror movie and that was why his imagination was working overtime. Robbie accepted this solution with caution; went back to watching television and fell asleep with a candy bar in his hand.

Melinda made sure all the candles were out on the pumpkins, turned off the porch light to “close up shop to the trick or treaters” then settle down to the couch with her romance novel. She took a lollipop and absently sucked on the candy as she read her book grateful the evening was slowing down. She chuckled to herself when she thought of Robbie's fear of the Raggedy Ann doll. They were cute, not scary; they had bright bushy red hair, black puppy eyes, and the happiest of smiles.

They wore the most adorable dresses and trousers, their barber pole legs were another delight. One of the smaller dolls among Cindy's collection reminded Melinda of her childhood doll. They were harmless. However, Robbie had another vision, the Raggedy Ann dolls did have bright red hair, but it symbolized blood to him. Their black puppy eyes reminded him of an undisturbed evil, a blackness that seemed to smother him,

engulf him. Their smiles were not cute; they were wicked smirks; he hated those smiles the most. If it was not for the television, he would never set foot in the television room. He constantly reminded himself that they were only Mommy's dolls, cotton stuffing with fake smiles but such attempts were useless. Robbie feared those dolls.

Melinda sat her romance novel down and got a good look at the dolls, there were twenty to thirty Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls scattered all over the side of the room. Some were big and some were small, they sat on tables and on bookcase shelves. Some sat holding each other in little high chairs, some in tiny rocking chairs. There was even a Halloween themed Raggedy Ann doll that had an orange and black outfit that sat next to a pumpkin decoration on the floor. She wondered if they would be worth money in the future years; she had a strong feeling they would.

A collector's doll had a trademark on them. The trademark was a heart on their chest that said, "I Love You." She wondered if all the dolls were collector's items. She was curious about one particular doll, the one Robbie was afraid of. It was five feet tall and was sitting in a large rocking chair, staring right into Melinda's eyes. Melinda placed her novel down and stood up and approached quietly, she did not want to wake up Robbie. She grasped the doll's upper dress and pulled it gently outward. Sure enough, the trademark was printed on the doll's chest, Melinda's curiosity was satisfied. This particular doll definitely will be worth money one day. Melinda walked back to the couch, sat down with her legs curled under her and continued to read. She took the remaindering sucks off her lollipop and crunched the center of the candy. She remembered vaguely of a commercial about a cartoon owl sucking on the lollipop brand and how many licks it took to get to the center of the pop. She smiled, took the cardboard white stick of the lollipop pop and placed it on the candy wrapper that was on the table to be thrown out the next time she went back in the kitchen.

It was an hour later when Melinda started to nod and felt sleepy. Melinda's eyelids felt like bricks as she was being overcome by pure boredom. Eventually, Melinda's eyes were closed, but was not quite asleep yet only in a twilight state. Suddenly, she felt

tiny hands clutching her; then grasping her blouse, at first, she thought she was dreaming. She felt tiny fingers touching her; it felt like fingers of a small child. Melinda tried to focus her mind to wake up, the fingers started to get a hold of her blouse firmly, a sudden violent jerk shook her blouse outwards.

Melinda woke up and let out a sudden scream of shock as her mind was now alert and cautious. Undisturbed by Melinda's screams, Robbie remained asleep peacefully on the floor. Violently, Melinda looked around trying to think rationally, trying to identify the intruder. There was no one in sight, she tried to think, to stop the panic that was beginning to take over. There had to be someone or something that had lifted her blouse and jerked her forward. There was only Robbie and he was still sleeping.

Slowly, Melinda's eyes bulged out with disbelief, the fear rising, she clutched her throat trying to stem the flow of bile that was rising in her throat. The Raggedy Ann doll in the rocking chair was now closer; the rocking chair began to move at a steady pace.

The doll was no longer cute with black puppy eyes. Before, the doll had a child-like face, but now it was somehow different. It was strange to look at it now, it knew something which you did not, the doll was frightening and it was moving closer. How could it move by itself? Melinda's mind searched for an answer, her mind did not comprehend what her eyes were looking at.

It could not have been Robbie; he was asleep on the floor and was not pretending to be asleep. Melinda's senses were not registering; it was then that the Raggedy Ann doll winked its left eye. Melinda's mind closed; the room swirled before her, she then fainted on the couch. Robbie slowly stopped snoring as the house became as silent as the dead. The room began to smell like sulfur; a surge of energy was forming in the room. It started flowing throughout the house, an energy so strong that it made the light bulb become brighter in the lamp next to Melinda until the bulb exploded shoving shrapnel of sheared light bulb all over the table. A greenish glow was coming from the dolls' eyes, you could see the glow from the entry way.

Slowly you started to hear a sound from the television room; at first it was low steady hum, then it started to glow. The humming morphed into the sound of a little girl laughing, only it was a wicked, an unholy laugh of a girl. It was the laughter of the Raggedy Ann doll. Its eyes with the green glow was emitting from the collection, casting a weird light in the room. The doll laughing, but not really laughing sat in the rocking chair, watching everything and everyone.



Chapter Five

"The Confrontation"

DAVID AND CINDY SHARED the dance floor; Cindy did not have this fun since she was a teenager. They danced like old pros. David's Robin Hood costume made it easy for him to move around the dance floor where other cumbersome Halloween costumes from other men made them look clumsy. Vampires and superheroes tripped over their capes and other females that dressed in other outfits had a hard time dancing making Cindy and David stick out as talented dancers.

Cindy was feeling things she had not felt for awhile. She wondered if she knew what love was anymore. She did not know. Surely, a widow who is on her first date does have the capacity to fall in love at first sight. May-be Cindy was fickle or just plain confused the only thing she knew for sure is that she felt the same warm feeling in her heart when she was with Bob. The whole evening was like a Walt Disney story. In afterthought, Cindy realized she was having such a good time, she forgot to check on Melinda.

She excused herself stating she had to check on the baby-sitter. David smiled and went back to their table while Cindy walked to the front of The Metro to the public phone. David really liked Cindy and he thought of the little boy he had not meant yet but heard so much about. She would be a package deal and hoped the boy would like him to pursue a relationship with his mother. He flagged a vampire waiter and ordered drinks for them both while Cindy made her call.

Melinda woke up slowly as the phone rang. Robbie's eyes opened also at the same time. She quickly answered the telephone on the end table with the lamp. "Hello?" she said as she looked at pieces of the light bulb and looked very puzzled and confused.

"Ho Melinda, this is Cindy. Is everything over there okay? Just checking in" Cindy practically yelled into the telephone to drown the noise of the music in the background. Melinda's mind quickly analyzed what had happened to her. Was the Raggedy

Ann alive or was it a dream? She held a piece of a broken glass and examined it light she was discovering a fossil as her thoughts raced. She tried to decide what reality was. She answered Mrs. Kilpatrick at the first thought that came to her mind by bursting out, *"Everything is just fine Cindy. Robbie had a little nap and I was just sitting here reading a book."*

"Wonderful. I was expecting you to say Robbie had set the house on fire or something like that. You know did I ever tell you what he had done to three of my dolls? That is why is he being punish you know, well never mind that. That's really good news for me. Oh before I go, I think Robbie can stay up late if he wants to and you can handle him. I am having a really good time Melinda; I want to thank you for sacrificing your Halloween for me." Before Melinda could mutter another word, there was a dial tone buzzing in her ear. Melinda simultaneously dialed her friend, Charlene. Robbie looked at his baby-sitter bizarre behavior with a serious look trying to read her body language and slowly turning his head back to the collection.

If you wanted to go out with Charlene, you had to drag her out of the house. She was the type of girl who would be delighted to get married and stay home literally even in the prime of her youth. It was not healthy as far as Melinda was concerned. However, she would never criticize her friend again because her being home was her salvation. The telephone rang four times before Charlene answered, *"Hello?"*

"Charlene, this is Melinda. I need you to come over to Mrs. Kilpatrick's place right away." Melinda pleaded.

"What for? What's wrong? Do you know what time it is" Charlene questioned lazily.

"I have no time to explain right now. All I know that there is something very strange happening in this house and I need you here. I need my best friend here right now." Melinda said in almost tears. Charlene did not say anything and then Melinda heard her clapping in applause on the telephone.

"Beautiful acting girlfriend. You have to do better than that to get this bitch out of this house. What do you take me for, a fool? Don't you think I know a Halloween prank when I hear one? News Flash. It is almost ten o'clock, Halloween is over!"

“Charlene, I swear, I need you here now. There is something wrong with this house” Melinda said in a loud whisper trying to hide her fear from Robbie but not doing a very good job at it.

“Okay, Okay, there is something wrong with the house. What do you want me to do? What can I do? Here is an idea, if something strange in the house as you say, why don’t you just leave. You don’t live there girl. That’s what I would do.”

Charlene seemed more serious now not sure if her friend was indeed in trouble or trying a last minute prank on her. Charlene made a point, it was logical but if she left the house with Robbie, what would she say to Cindy? Leave a note?

Dear Cindy,

Had to leave in a great hurry. STAY OUT OF THE HOUSE! Your collections of Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls are coming to life. I know because one rocked its chair then winked its left eye at me. You can reach me and Robbie at my house.

Melinda

That would be a laugh. Cindy would have her committed to a psycho-ward for sure. She would just have to stay here the rest of the night until Cindy returned. She thought of her suggestion seriously and finally replied what seemed like an awkward amount of silence.

“Please Charlene. I am dead serious. I will explain everything when you get here. Do this one favor for me.” It must have been the way Melinda was talking or the tone in her voice that scared Charlene and she immediately changed her tone.

“I am leaving now, stay by the telephone.” Charlene hung up on the telephone. The whole episode was probably just a dream after all. She didn’t like the idea of endangering her friend’s life. She just wanted to be comforted like you would after watching a horror picture. If Robbie and Melinda stuck together, everything would be fine, but where was Robbie; he was nowhere in sight. During her call to her friend, he slipped from her sight. She searched the room avoiding the dolls’ glances, their smiles. She screamed his name as loud as she could, leaving an eerie

echo throughout the house. She was about to go mad when Robbie returned Melinda's call with a familiar song.

"I betcha you can't find me..."

I betcha you can't find me..."

I betcha you can't find me..."

Melinda clenched her fists in fury but at the same time did not want Robbie to know about her fears of the dolls. She did not want him to start crying and weeping over the dolls especially she felt herself holding back her tears herself. She strained her hearing and pinpointed him moving around upstairs. She wanted to sneak upstairs and surprise the imp. She gently grasped the railing and inched her way up the stairs, watching her every step carefully. She was almost at the top of the stairs she heard a squeak as the bedroom door was being opened. You could not see the door but the light was on in the room, projecting a reflection of light on the wall at the top of the stairs.

Robbie was trying to sneak out of the room, she was sure of it and his shadow was being cast on the wall. Melinda's eyes started to bugle, this shadow was not being made by Robbie.

The outline of this shadow had bushy hair and it seemed wobbly. Small footsteps were heard as it approached the top of the stairs. Very slowly it came walking around the corner of the hallway coming into full view for Melinda. That's when Melinda saw the five foot Raggedy Ann doll glaring down at her with a wicked smile. Its eyes were glowing and stood at the foot of the stairs with a hungry look if that was even possible.

Melinda turned around screaming and lost her footing in the process. She went tumbling down the stairs and hit her head at the bottom of the stairs. A slow trickle of blood was oozing from the cut on her forehead as the Raggedy Ann creature looked down at her pleased with this turn of events. The doll started laughing childishly as it inched down the stairs; never once did the mouth move but as if a child was buried deep in the cloth of the doll, the laughter seemed muffled. The sound of the laughter became louder like surround sound in a stereo system and it echoed throughout the house.

The laughter was everywhere Robbie thought. He had heard Melinda screaming and knew she was in trouble. He had to investigate to determine what was going on in his home. If he knew what awaited him, he would have stayed in his hiding spot. He saw the Raggedy Ann doll, placing its hand over Melinda's nose and mouth. She was not breathing anymore; that thing is trying to suffocate his babysitter.

Robbie quickly went down the stairs and grabbed the jack o lantern that stood at the mantel post at the end of the stairs. He raised the pumpkin over his head to smash it on top of the doll's head. The doll jerked its head in his direction stopping Robbie in his tracks, frozen in fear. The eyes of the doll pulsated with a glow that made the pumpkin explode in Robbie's hands. Chunks of pumpkin goo went spraying all over the wall and Robbie's clothes. Robbie saw the stitching of the doll's face move like a snake slithering on its face until it smiled gleefully.

Robbie fell backwards on the stairs shocked and crying. The doll no longer paying attention to Melinda turned its head to the television room, eyes getting brighter. What was the doll creature doing?

There was no time for crying or falling to the ground weeping. It was about time Robbie stood on his own feet and fought like a man. There was a time when Mom and Dad, even the baby-sitter is not there to save you. Just then a horrible thought came to his mind. Did the dolls get to his father? A newfound terror was born within him as he managed to stand up and slowly inched himself backwards up the stairs. He now believed the dolls scared his father to death. He would fight this battle the little boy thought not as Batman or Superman but as Robbie Kilpatrick but how was the magic question.

The Raggedy Ann doll did not believe in fair odds. As it stood by Melinda unaware of Robbie's retreat, tiny thuds were heard from the television room. All the Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls, the big and the small, were coming to life. They marched drunkenly, looking up towards Robbie as if they were receiving silent instructions. When Robbie saw the whole collection marching towards him; that is when he found his strength and

let out a scream. He ran upstairs to his mother's bedroom locking the bedroom door behind him.

A child should not have to face supernatural forces to prove his manhood he thought. There would be another day for this moment and for the first time, he welcome dealing with Kenny Masson, the school's bully. He did not know if Melinda was dead or alive but he did see the blood and that made him almost vomit. He covered his mouth pushing the visions away and locked himself in his mother's closet. There was no time to check for Boogeyman or some hideous rate monster like he normally did. This was no game and he felt fear, real fear for the first time in his life. He thought of dying and another tear rolled down his face as he closed his eyes tight hoping this might make the night be over with. He could hear tiny footsteps getting closer to his mother's door.



Chapter Six

“Roadblocks”

CHARLENE WAS DRIVING about 25 MPH when she had her blow out. She had cursed into the empty air when it happened but was thankful no one was hurt while she pulled over the side of the road. Her best friend was in need for some bizarre reason she could not understand and here she stood with a flat tire.

She looked around to see if anyone would help and saw a few college kids walking to wherever ignoring her, still in their Halloween outfits.

“Halloween is over assholes. God I hate Halloween.” Charlene said out loud then approached the flat tire like she knew she was doing but of course did not. She looked at the tire in disgust then figure it would be better to walk to the Kilpatricks at this point since the house was only a few blocks where she was at. She would deal with this tomorrow. It was moments like this when she wished she had a boyfriend. The boyfriend would replace the tire and who knows even pay for it if she did the right kind of promises. She smirked at her own joke then frown when she realized there was no boyfriend to manipulate in her life.

She was about to begin her long walk when she noticed what seemed like a candy cane, an inch from her flat tire. It was a Raggedy Ann doll just like the one she remembered in Mrs. Kilpatrick’s doll collection. It freaked her out how her card had not run it over. Why didn’t any the greedy trick or treaters grabbed the lost toy. It had a red and white checker board shirt on and had blue trousers. He had on the cutest sailor’s hat. It was adorable, at least in Charlene’s eyes. However, she was not into dolls and knew just the person who would appreciate this newfound treasure. She sat the doll on the passenger’s seat and made a mental note to mention the doll when she saw Mrs. Kilpatrick. She then took a deep breath and started walking down the street. The Raggedy Andy doll smiled; the smile of accomplishment.

Chapter Seven

“The Doll Haters”

MELINDA WAS ON THE FLOOR at the bottom of the stairs still not moving. Robbie strained his ears behind the confines of his mother’s bedroom closet door. The only sounds he heard the bedroom door being pushed on and heard the wood door weakening. He bit the bottom of his lower lip whimpering in fear as he heard the splitting of woodchips as the dolls demonstrated their massive strength.

Robbie closed his eyes even tighter, hoping the nightmare would end; it did not. At that moment, the door flew open with incredible force. As the door opened, the door knob made a crack in the wall upon impact. The small pink door stopper his mother had at the floor brought at the local grocery store for such as an occasion prove to be a worthless purchase and it was pushed aside by the force of the door. The dolls poured into the room like rats in search for the last remaining piece of nourishment. They scattered all over the room searching for Robbie. It was only a matter of time before they checked the closet. The five foot doll was the last to enter the room like a marching general in battle.

It stopped at the doorway and turned its head back and forth like a robot. Suddenly, the eyes became brighter than before. It was directing its minions; the dolls began moving towards the closet. Robbie saw all this activity through the closet’s door and mini blinds. He took a deep breath knowing he would soon be discovered. Slowly his skin began to crawl with disgust. Something was climbing up his leg! It was a two inch tall Raggedy Ann doll. Robbie jumped and screamed as he shook the doll from his leg, shaking it violently like the very touch of the doll was hot flames ready to engulf his flesh. He pushed the doors open and ran out of the closet. As he tried to escape to the bedroom doorway; he flung the dolls in all directions. They were flying into walls and furniture.

He almost made it to the door when one of the dolls tripped him. The dolls quickly covered his body like spiders. He could not move to regain his balance and a small part of his panic

thoughts he was amaze at the weight the dolls had, like brinks, as they held him down. He laughed hysterically remembering the book he read in school, *"Gulliver's Travels"* and how he seemed like a character in the book. His laughter soon turned to cries of despair as the tall Raggedy, the tall one, the leader, started to laugh as it stood by the bedroom doorway, watching the take down of the little human boy, the son of the doll hater.

Melinda's first image was the ceiling. She scanned her memory and remembered about the doll attack. Her eyes focused on her surroundings then suddenly the sharp pains in head struck her. She sat up and put her hand to her head feeling the blood from her cut on her head. She slowly got up and looked at herself in the mirror, the same mirror Cindy looked at before the arrival of her gentleman friend. He head ached but realized it was nothing life threatening but it would have to be attended to with some ice. She felt a little dizzy but otherwise felt okay. Her thoughts then were redirected to Robbie. She looked around the house and before she uttered his name, she heard him screaming for him from upstairs. She heard the fear in his voice and she knew this was no childhood game or belated Halloween prank. She looked up and immediately put her hands to her mouth to muffle her own screams.

Robbie was being carried by the dolls. They were going to throw him down the stairs. Melinda had to something. The dolls then suddenly threw the boy down the stairs and bounced off the first three steps. Melinda caught him awkwardly before he continued to fall. She instructed him to go for help to the neighbors and he nodded without saying a word and ran down the stairs.

He stopped at the foot of the stairs to watch Melinda confront the army of the dolls. She was actually going to fight them. He shook his head in disbelief as the dolls went on the offensive and grabbed her legs and began biting her legs. Melinda howled in pain as she knocked her attackers off her legs. Melinda was not thinking logically anymore. She just knew she had to get rid of these dolls and get to the tall one, the tall one giving the orders with its glowing eyes. The leader watched the female human unimpressed. Its puppy eyes started to glow a

green color now and the dolls retreated. They all ran back down the stairs. Robbie pressed his body against the wall avoiding the dolls hoping the dolls were not coming from him. He blinked the tears away from his vision and saw the collection retreating back into the television room reassuming their original positions. He slowly turned his head back up the stairs and saw the showdown between the baby-sitter and the doll.

The doll took the first steps forward towards Melinda as Melinda took a step backwards grabbing the railing of the stairway so she would not make the same mistake again. The doll stopped when Melinda moved analyzing her moves. Melinda then stepped back on the second floor no longer on the stairs. The doll took another two quick steps forward in response. Melinda looked to her left and her right looking for something to defend herself all along cussing her friend, Charlene in head for taking her sweet time getting to the Kilpatricks. She saw a small hallway table with a plant on top. She could smell the plant vase onto the doll she thought and she quickly moved to grab the plant. Anticipating her move, the tall doll leaped at her like a panther and she went to crashing to the floor. The doll was powerful; it grasped her blouse and tore it off revealing her bra. *"Oh my God, I am going to be rape by a freakin doll"* she thought and that repulsive thought gave her a little more energy as she kicked and screamed to get free from the doll. The doll had no such intentions but simply did not like anyone touching its clothes like Melinda had done so before.

Her struggles were futile and she was amazed at the dolls strength over her own, it was like fighting a powerful man. It grasped her neck and began banging her head on the floor. The remaining of the collection seemed to know the status of the fight as they laughed from the television room wanting to join in the fun but were instructed to retreat.

Robbie too afraid to do anything hid behind a table that was located near the front door. He was afraid if he attempted to leave the collection would come after him so he sat there crying not knowing what to do.

Melinda felt herself fading as her original injury intensified as her body was introduced to new sensations of pain. She thought

she was going to die then all of sudden the doll let go of her. It was preoccupied looking at the wall, as though someone was calling out to it. It seemed to be something through the wall that no one else could see or hear.

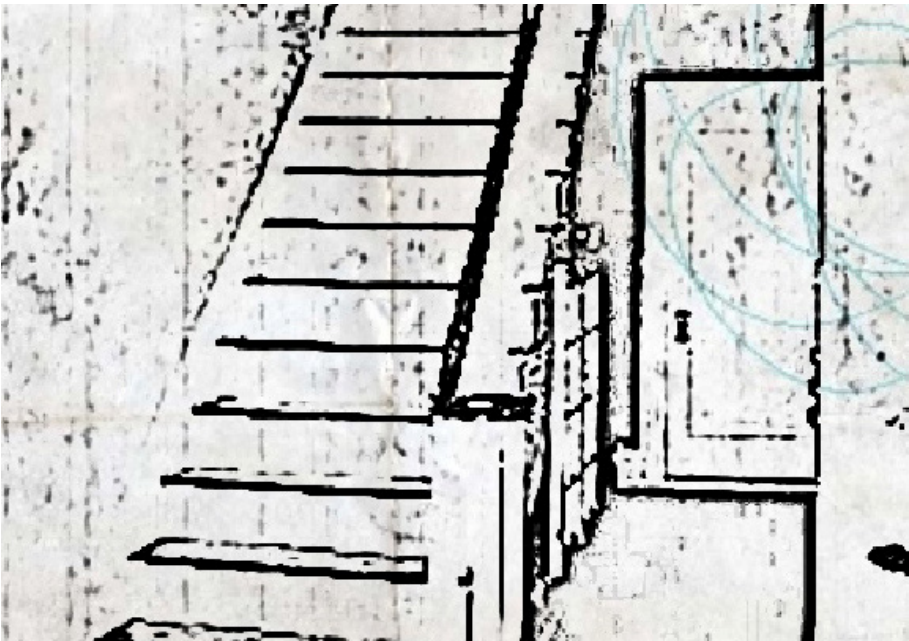
Outside of the house, David and Cindy had pulled up to the house. Sir Robin Hood got out of his car and ran to the passenger's side of the car and let out his lady in waiting. Cindy got out of the car like Cinderella thanking David for an unforgettable Halloween and first date. They made jokes about his green tights, gave her a kiss good night and he left. The leader of the collection observed the gentleman caller leaving and then looked down at the baby-sitter disappointed.

Melinda's eyes refocused and she quickly got up away from the doll. She backed up and was puzzled at why the doll was staring at the wall. The doll looked at the female human one more time and hissed at her but its mouth did not move. The baby-sitter lives for now; the collection would have to complete their main objective some other time; kill all doll-haters. Unless Robbie changed his ways; he would die just like his father and anyone who did not admire the collection. Then within seconds, the tall doll ran down the stairs, tripping over its clumsy candy-cane legs but regained its footing without effort and continued to the television room to rejoin the others.

The dolls hated Melinda for treating them like dolls. The female baby-sitter has been educated and now knows better. Cindy Kilpatrick would never treat her dolls like things in a room. She would talk to them with love and understanding and most of all she would respect them. The collection had taught the boy and the girl what respect was and what awaited them when that respect was not displayed.

Melinda stumbled down the stairs, drained. Robbie greeted her warmly; his terror was over for now. He hugged the waist of the baby-sitter not saying a word. Melinda peeked into the television room and saw the collection as she remembered it when she first arrived. She heard the clicking of keys and Melinda turned to the front door to see Cindy entering the front door. The house was in shambles with Melinda's blood everywhere and pumpkin guts from earlier. Cindy had an

expression of shock and confusion. Before Melinda could utter a word, she blacked out.



Chapter Eight

"The Smile"

MELINDA WOKE UP with Cindy looking over her. She was laid on the coach covered in a blanket covering up her torn blouse. Cindy had a look of confusion and sick revulsion on her face as she looked down at the baby-sitter.

"I knew I should have never left this house. Robbie told me everything my dear child. Do you know who these men were?"

"Mrs. Kilpatrick? Cindy? What men? I am." Melinda tried to speak.

"Those disgusting pigs of course, those pigs that broke into this house and cause all this havoc. Robbie told me you fought them off but no worries my dear. The police are on their way and I have called your mother."

"Robbie! Where's Robbie's and what about the dolls?"

"Robbie's asleep my child, he is safe thanks to you." Cindy said ignoring the second half of the question.

"The dolls Cindy, what about that damn collection of yours? Where are the fuckin dolls? Cindy?" Melinda said half screaming in hysterics sitting up abruptly and immediately fell back on the coach to felt the lump on her forehead.

"Melinda my dear. You had quite a nasty bump on your head and a very dramatic experience. There is no need to take that type of language in this house. Robbie's father used to cuss too and it upset me so, God Rest his soul"

Cindy looked at Mrs. Kilpatrick with newfound eyes, eyes of concern and what the woman she had become since her husband's death. Cindy walked over to the collection of dolls and Melinda wanted to scream for her to take cover but said nothing. Her stomach went into knots wondering if she really did get attack and was trying to remember. Who were the men that attacked her? They were no men, it was simply the dolls. Cindy did not seemed bother by them as she walk back and forth examining the dolls talking to Melinda with her back to her.

“Yes, Bob did cuss a lot, that was his only flaw and that was the God honest truth. I did not like and my babies did not like it. Isn’t that right my beautiful Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls? You do not like that nasty talk do you, it is distasteful” Cindy then turned around and looked at Melinda. She walked over to Melinda and bent down to look at her forehead. She heard sirens in the distance. Melinda looked at Cindy with fearful eyes now at her unnatural maternal instinct to the doll collection. Perhaps, it was a strong belief in the dolls that made them seem real. She had always used to make her dolls become alive when she was young; it was a funny thought but a frightening thought when that person was no longer a child but a middle aged widower.

“Do not worry dear. I hear the ambulance coming. Let me get you another wash cloth for that head of yours. Your mother should be here in minutes also. I am so glad you were here to protect my dolls.” Cindy walked away from Melinda towards the kitchen and stopped realizing what she had said.

“And thank you for watching over Robbie and protecting him also. Sometimes I worry about that boy and what will happen to him one of these days if he does not behave himself.”

“Robbie is a good boy Cindy. He did not give me any trouble what so ever. He just does not like your dolls.” Melinda snapped at Cindy.

“Yes I know” Cindy said flatly and walked out of the room. Melinda looked at the ceiling confused ever more over the conversation. She looked at her watch and it was late. Perhaps, she fell and hit her head and she dreamt the whole experience. After all, if it was real, where was Charlene? She heard the sirens getting closer and was glad to have another adult in this madhouse. This would be her last baby-sitter gig for sure she thought to herself. She laughed to herself wondering if she did dream the whole thing and looked at the doll collection. Her smile turned to a frown when she saw the tall Raggedy Ann doll. It had moved a couple of inches closer. The rocking chair it was sitting in was moving very slightly. It had to be Cindy that somehow moved the chair when she was examining them she thought and pushed her paranoid thoughts

in the back of her head. She looked at the dolls and gave a weak smile. The rocking chair didn't move closer, it just seemed like it did. It was her imagination; it had to be. She tried to replay the events that took place earlier in the night and had a hard time recounting the events that took place. Her head hurt so much, it hurt to think. She closed her eyes listening to Cindy fix her a new wash cloth in the kitchen as the sirens from the ambulance got closer.

A nearby lamp suddenly went off by itself. Cindy and Melinda were both aware of such actions and the television room was cast into darkness on this late Halloween night. A glow within a battery operated jack o lantern untouched by the night's activities that was placed on the floor next to the doll collection cast an eerie glow in the room. The glow from the plastic pumpkin focused on the face of the tall motionless Raggedy Ann doll in the rocking chair. Only its face seemed to be lit. Everything around it was dark. The Raggedy Ann doll then winked its left eye at the unaware Melinda.

The End

“NIGHT DELUSIONS”

Chapter One

“Waking Up”

THE ROOM SMELT LIKE dirty laundry, a smell of hopelessness and despair. Mark Bradley lay in his bed alone. He was kept awake by the raving of the five other patients located in the same room. What had happened to him? Why was he in this dreadful place where society tucks away the rejects, the disturbed, and the insane? Mark could not comprehend why his only family had deserted him. He was put in this institution about six months ago diagnosed for schizophrenia; a mental and emotional disorder that results in a distorted perception of reality.

Mark’s family and friends were so concern for him that they had him committed into this place. In Mark’s mind he was fine. It hurt for him to stay focus on and tell the people around him he was fine. He was acute of one afternoon, his mother was crying to him about something and he was talking about his health and the following moment he was talking about the black footed ferrets on the endangered species list and how we all should take a moment to get involved. His mother would look at him shaking her head in despair and disbelief and ran out of the room. What were they talking about? His health? Work? Ferrets? Did it matter, it did not matter to Mark that his mother was crying; that was her problem.

His family had enough of Mark and could not take the insanity anymore. Endless doctor appointments, support groups, countless medications, cat-scans, it was endless. One night, he imagined creatures, monsters out of his childhood nightmares appeared in front of him; their only goal was to terrorize him or worst eat him. The medication these good people in this white rubber room kept those images away. Now, coming out of his artificial high, he started to drift back into the morning sun when one of the men in white came into the room.

“Mark, wake up buddy boy” the orderly said in a white uniform. His dark hair was obviously coated with a hair dye. The orderly

smiled at Mark with two missing feet. He had a small scar on his forehead and look like he should be behind bars instead in some authority position; life could be unfair sometimes.

Mark's eyes opened quickly and stared at the man with complete paranoia. "*There is someone here to see you, a woman named Terri*" the orderly said flatly. In moments, the man with the weird smile escorted Mark down the hallway. Moans and shrieks were heard as every individual had to cope with their private hell.

Terri Coleman stood shocked at Mark's presence, her ex-boyfriend and former lover. The man in white left the two lovebirds alone to their privacy but nevertheless had the whole reunion under surveillance by their two-way mirror. "*He looks so much older rotting in this place*" Terri thought. She hugged him in an awkward fashion and he slowly responded in return. She was as beautiful as Mark remembered.

Her blonde hair and her sparkling blue eyes brighten this depressing asylum, which he knew deep in his heart was his home for a very long time if not forever. Mark's thoughts drifted to their last night together before Terri screamed and called his parents. He remembered making love to her feeling her soft skin against his, the smoothness of her skin and the tenderness of her womanhood engulf Mark to a place he did not want to leave. Their relationship felt right as love often will do to two people who were madly in love with each other. He recalled looking into eyes lying next to her naked body under the bed covers. She was and still is very beautiful. The look in Terri's eyes told him she was thinking of the same things of him. However, the look in Terri's eyes also told Mark there was a part of her that feared him. She was already aware of his problems with his family and the strange outbursts and was unable to hold down a job for very long. She did not know the details but figure the best medicine for Mark was her and her unconditional love. She loved Mark so much and it never occurred to her that he would try taking his own life. It was a special night for him and at that moment he wanted to kiss her again and feel her warm touch.

He touched her golden hair and proceeded to kiss her. Despite her mixed feelings, she allowed this special night. This kiss, however, did not feel like the love making she had just experienced. Later, she tried to explain to others, it was like being kissed by a stranger and not Mark Bradley. His kiss was consisting of no charm or emotion and she felt sick to her stomach for allowing these revulsions to suddenly appear. She pushed him away, breaking his imagined "moment of romance."

"Mark, please stop. This has to end. I have come here tonight to say good-bye. These last couple of days have been very stressful for me. I thought my love was strong enough to bring you back wherever; madness your mind took you. Look at me; I am in bed with you. What's wrong with me?" Terri burst into tears and sat up on the bed, her back to him covering her nude body with the bed spread.

"You stupid whore! Get outta of my life you gutless bitch! Who do you think you are dealing with? You tell me you love me and you let me fuck you and now you are telling me it is all over? Bull Shit!" Mark screamed at her. He jumped out of the bed naked and started knocking books off his shelf, smashing them to the ground. He picked up a golf trophy he received in his youth and hurled it across the room smashing a small decorative mirror he bought at the local IKEA retail store. Terri screamed in terror and grabbed her clothes clutching them to her naked body and ran to the bedroom door. She stopped and looked at Mark with pity when he spoke again.

"Honey, please do not go. He is gone. He does not love you like I do. I made him go for good this time. I will not allow anyone to disrespect you, disrespect the girl of my dreams. Please do not be mad at him. It's me honey, Mark, the man you love." Mark said as calm and collected. Terri shook her head in disbelief.

"Mark, this is not funny. You are scaring me. I didn't want to believe it and I would have never believed it unless I seen it with my own eyes" Terri said in tears, slowly putting on her panties then her pants then the rest of her clothes. She waited for an answer from Mark and he was silent and she slowly stopped dressing and looked up slowly to face the man she once knew.

Mark sat on the floor and was examining his naked body like he was looking at himself for the first time. His hands slowly caress his chest then looked astonished when he saw his genitals. He held his manhood in disbelief then noticed Terri was looking at him. He blushed then grabbed the pillow and hid his nakedness from Terri.

“Eeew you are a girl. What are you doing in my room? Do you know where my mommy and daddy are? What happened to my body, why am I so hairy? What’s has happened to me?” Mark seemed to take on another personality, a personality of his younger self or someone completely new. Terri did not know which but put her hands to her mouth and shook her head in disbelief. She found the doorknob from behind and opened the door and let herself out. She never looked back when she heard Mark crying for his parents. Whoever was in the room was not the man she just made love to for the last time.

That night was months ago and Mark did not recall the true events of that night. He remembered making love and she left him shortly after that. He did not understand what happened to his stuff and assumed it was Terri but it was him. There was a very awkward silence until Terri took a step backwards when she finally spoke first.

“Mark, I am moving back to New Jersey next week. I could not have leave without seeing you one more time” she said in a mousey frighten voice. Mark’s mind began to twitch. The wall behind Terri started to move in waves like a waterbed would after sitting down on the mattress, then suddenly, they came. At first there was only one, then two and a third, then multitudes jumped hideously from the wall. Mark’s eyes widened with horror and he broke out in a cold sweat. Terri did not notice and she continued her rehearsed “Dear John” speech on how this was best for the both of them.

The lamp next to the doorway where Terri first entered turned into a ghastly mushroom creature with a sandpaper texture for skin. The whole room was like a glimpse of hell. He started to rave and shout and frantically wave his arms, running here and there like a madman interrupting Terri’s speech. Terri started

screaming for the guard but Mark knew the guards would not come in. He saw one of the flying creatures pressing against the door as the guards tried pushing on the door realizing the master key was not unlatching the door's dead bolt. Terri continued backing up from Mark looking for an exit in case the guards were unable to open the door.

"Those things, they're here again! I think they have come for you this time!" he screamed in madness. Terri was pressed a wall across the room a safe distance from Mark as she try to reach the man she once knew by screaming back.

"Mark, there is nobody in this room except you and I. Please do not do this to me; I would never lie to you. These are delusions, figments of your mind." Terri cried screaming.

"Guards! Guards!" she screamed again terrified and regretting her decision to see him one last time. The creature by the doorway licked its chops as the guards tried to get the door open and Terri could hear them body slamming into the door at this point.

"They're real, I tell you. Does this cut look like a delusion to you?" Mark snapped as he held his arm showing an imaginary cut on his arm. He then dodged to the ground to avoid a bat-like creature. He looked up at her with madness in his eyes and without warning charged her. *"Get off her you damn bastards."* He grabbed her shoulders and almost torn off her blouse, punching and clawing at empty air above her shoulders. Terri closed her eyes more emotionally drained and distraught then fearful then opened her eyes were she heard a loud crashing at the door as the men in white dragged Mark away while another man touched her shoulder trying to reassure her she was safe now. This particular orderly was old enough to be her father and he had a maternal protective fatherly instinct about him. She looked at him and saw the love for another fellow human being in his eyes but she did not hear a word he said. She only tuned into the shrieking of Mark as he was dragged down the cold hallway. She looked at the orderly one more time then without a word stormed out of the exit doorway regretting this visit. In Mark's mind, he saw the last of Terri Coleman, the woman he truly loved. She met an unexpected

death being torn into shreds, blood and body fragments being sprayed all over the lobby. Of course, he was the only one to witness her execution because it was all in his head.



Chapter Two

“Mark’s Alter Egos”

MARK’S EYES OPENED the next day, he was stripped down to his uniform underwear, shivering and shaking to a strapped cold steel table. Medical ICU stickers were pasted on his forehead and chest like a pin cushion. Wires flowed from these medical devices to an annoying impersonal flashing computer with all sorts of monitors. He did not know of the machine but he seen enough television medical shows to know it was some ICU equipment to monitor various pressures of his body such as blood pressure, brain waves, and so on. He seemed very relax and mellow then felt the sting in his arm where there was no ICU sticker. A small puncture in his arm told him he was either stun by a very large bubble bee or these men in white gave him some medication to calm him down. He felt so relaxed and thought of Terri. When was she coming back to get him out so they can make love again. He longed for her, her touch, the smell of her hair, the warmth of her body then he remembered her death and scream in anguish.

He remembered in great detail of her death and was outraged no one listened to his pleas for someone to save her. He shook his head violently screaming, *“You heartless bastards!”* then he was suddenly quiet.

Diana Collins, a young attractive single parent physiologist watched the young man twist his body in painful convulsions. She was sitting at his side all this time watching Mark go into a fit making notes in her pad. She smiled at the orderly with another injection in hand and waved him to go out of the room. He nodded and complied. She then turned her attention to Mark and finally spoke.

“This is Doctor Diana Collins, whom do I have the pleasure of speaking to at this moment?” she asked methodically. Mark slowly turned to Diana and spoke.

“You are not my mother? Where Ma and Pa? Where is this place?” Mark said with a southern accent.

“You still did not answer my question” Diana persisted.

“Randy, mamm. I thank I left my ranch in the back of that pickup truck my brother from Jawjuh bard a few munts ago” he said.

“What state do you live in Randy” Diana said amused ignoring the poorly structure sentence he just said. He did not answer her and for a moment Diana felt sad for him and a little taken back. There was an internal struggle going on in his mind that was for certain. She stood up not waiting for a response and left the room. Mark gritted his teeth staring into nothingness. Slowly there seemed to be some recognition behind his eyes and he started into the two way mirror where Diana had retreated to continuing her observations.

Behind the mirror Diana felt his eyes locking onto her as he saw her behind the mirror. She felt a chill up her spine and put the palm of her right hand to her mouth to utter surprise as Mark cried out.

“They’re in the room now, stop them! For mercy’s sake please stop them. They’re going to kill me then they will go after you, this I promise you! Someone help me, God Damn you all!” he screamed into the empty room. His eyes were filled with complete madness. Diana picked up the phone to call security for another sedative and hesitated considering he was already pumped with a dose less than an hour ago.

In the room where Mark was strapped down, the cold silence of the white room filled with loud whispers and deadly promises; the bat-like creatures were back flying around the room like flies. A few of them bit each other in mid flight hungry for anything including each other. An eight foot monster appeared in the room. It slowly took the shape of an outline of a horse with the floor in which it rose from the depths from. The floor coloring on the horse slowly sucked into the body as a green hideous hide replaced the look of the floor. Fangs and features of the face appeared seconds later then the creature that was first part of the floor took its first of breath air, its first words were growls of hungry and rage. The creature took its first step and walked slowly to him, walking through the bat-like creatures as they flew in front of him. It finally stopped in front of him and let

its elongated bumpy tongue roll out its mouth, licking with anticipation to its human treat. The creature yawn and its mouth got wider and wider, and wider until it distorted to an unnatural hole. It then lowered its head over Mark's head ready to take a bite purposely going slowly to torture him. Mark shook in his restraints twisting his head back and forth.

"No! No! No!" he screamed. The creature almost had a grin in its huge mouth and it gently engulfed Mark's head. Mark felt its fangs touching his shoulders, the disgusting tongue licking the side of his face and earlobes like some sick form of foreplay. The light from the room was gone and he was in the head of the beast. He saw Terri's decapitated head at the end of its throat. The head spoke to Mark.

"I love you Mark, you know that don't you? Please make love to me one more time before I have to go" the head asked revealing her own tongue in a seductive manner for some mouth to mouth satisfaction. She then laughed hysterically as the end rolled down the throat of the beast like a log falling off a waterfall. Her laughter faded to screams of torture as the head traveled to the belly of the beast. Mark waiting for the beast to finish him off, waiting for the pain and the final blow but instead he felt a prick in his arm and his vision faded to darkness.

Diana Collins stood by Mark's side watching him drift off to sleep. She was looking at his chart and did not like the look of the orderly as he pulled out the needle that put his patient to sleep. He had a grin on his face like he loved his job too much and this bother her. *"I want this man in my office unrestrained in my office when he comes to"* she said to the orderly without making any eye contact. She kept on looking at his face and wondered why so a young man could be in just a bad place with no history of family mental illness or no record of drug use. The orderly with the scan snapped at the doctor and then lowered his voice to a more respectful tone to his superior.

"But doctor that is highly irregular, hospital regulations firmly state that under no circumstances..." the orderly tried to explain.

"I am quite aware of proper procedures and I do not have to justify my methods to you. You have my orders. I will sign the release papers." Diana snapped and left the room. The orderly

stood there staring after the good doctor resenting women in authority positions. “*Bitch*” he said under his breath then looked down at Mark and wondered why she had such an interest in a loser as this kid then quickly dismissed his concern.



Chapter Three

“Mark’s Story”

“HELLO RANDY,, I am a friend of Mark Bradley. I am Doctor Diana Collins.” Diana said to the unrestrained Mark Bradley an hour later.

“Me head hurts. Them boys sure are ignert for sticking me with a needle. I nevers done anything to them.”

“They are ignorant men indeed Randy. I can make your head stop hurting but I need to talk to Mark. Can you bring me Mark please?” Diana said in a motherly tone. Mark twitch a moment and his body language changed and a familiar personality resurfaced.

“It’s you again. What am I doing in your office Doctor Collins?” Mark asked.

“Welcome back Mark. We are trying to try a different approach today and I am going to hypnotize you. Is that alright with you? No outbursts okay. The doors are locked and it is just you and I. Deal?” Diana asked. Mark looked down at his arms and legs and was surprised to see he was not tied down and quickly looked behind him to verify the office door was locked. He was impressed with the good doctor’s faith in him and finally looked down at his feet and nodded in agreement.

It took Diana a half hour to penetrate the barriers of personalities to get Mark under her control and it was Mark who was hypnotized not Randy or other manifestations of his personality. After doing a few exercises she press *“play and record”* on her recorder and began her questioning.

“Mark, I want you to tell me everything in great detail. I want you to go back to your home on Los Angeles Avenue in Simi Valley. I want you to go back to the day your mother died. I want you to tell me what you are feeling.” Diana said in a soothing voice and Mark’s head dropped downwards as he began to speak to the ground.

“I hate God! Why did he take my mother? Your beloved wife? There can’t be a God especially when there is so much evil in the word, so much evil. Children are dying all over the world, good people like Mom. No father, there is no God at least not a

merciful one!" Mark jerked his head up and cocked it towards the left like he was listening to someone ignoring Diana's presence.

"Do not bother Dad. I am leaving this damn house. You can talk to your damn priest not me." Mark's yelling stopped and he started to cry uncontrollably. She made notes and did nothing to comfort him. His crying stopped then he looked serious and concerned as his mind fast forward to another timeframe.

"I moved in with my girlfriend after the second week my mother passed away. I was trying to get my life back in order. I'd even reenrolled in a community college for the spring. I refused to recognize any religious holidays, Easter, Christmas, you name it. I have even banned Saint Patrick's Day anything that resembled religion. Eventually, I was no longer mad at God. How can you be mad at something that does not exist? In my mind God did not exist so therefore I was not mad at him. Simple logic don't you think? Of course I could not find a job and I was living off my girlfriend which depressed me. After all, I was the man and it was the man's job to support the woman in his life but not me. Terri spoiled me but she faith in me when I did not. As long as she was getting it, she was fine with the situation. I guess I was a man- whore you could say but sex got old and that is when she started to get frustrated." Without notice Mark went silent and Diana thought she lost her connection with Mark then he continued his story like there was no interruption.

"One day Terri came home and bought me one of those self help book about meditation and well being and all that feel good about yourself and shit. It was an odd book though and I do not know where she got it definitely not from Crowns Book Store, it was an old book and dirty looking. I took it and read it for my situation sake but it felt gross like a dirty book in a dusty old bookstore with bugs. Needless to say, I did everything the book said to do because I knew she would most likely quiz me on the contents. I got good at the meditation and was able to go to my happy place. I would feel so relaxed. One particular meditation session it went too far. I felt myself so relaxed it felt like an out of body experience. I felt myself to float in the air but I knew I

was lying down as the book instructed. Then I heard a horrible growl, a bull dog growl then suddenly I felt like I was falling, falling back into my body. It was like my soul was unprotected and it was retreating back to my body. That is when it all started and I began to resent Terri for introducing the dark arts to me. She said it was not the occult but tools to positive thinking but I had my doubts. The growls became more frequent from that point on even when I was not meditating. I no longer wept for my mother because I had more problems to contend with. I felt I expose myself to something dark and now they wanted more of me and was coming for me."

Without warning Mark twitch in his trance and a poor imitation of a young girl's voice surface and replaced the personality of Mark Bradley.

"I am afraid of the dark. Mommy! Mommy turn on the light. I see them in the dark. Mommy! Where are you Mommy?" Mark screamed in a girl's voice.

"I need to talk to Mark please honey, give me Mark and I will put the lights on" Diana spoke to the new personality she had not encountered before.

"Who is that talking to me? Who is Mark? Where's my Mommy? Turn on the lights. Turn on the lights!" Mark screamed into the room. An orderly unlocked the office door with a needle in hand and the doctor waved him away. Diana clapped her hands and said the command word that was implanted into her patient's mind and the little girl in Mark's voice instantly disappeared and Mark sat looking at her.

He looked around the room and saw the expression on the doctor. *"When do we get started doc"* he asked. Diana smiled awkwardly at him and asked him about the self help book Terri got him. Mark looked puzzled at the question but told her everything she wanted to know which he thought was irrelevant to his treatment but the good doctor was onto something he could not understand.

That night Mark dreamt about Terri and he they were in a field of poppies hopelessly in love. She was in a white ritual dress he never saw her wear before and she seem so out of place but here she was. She laughed throughout the dream and a part of

him did not know if she was laughing at him or at him for some reason. Other people came running through the poppies to join the twosome. One was a little girl that strangely enough reminded Mark of someone. Another man joined the girl who wore a mechanic's gray uniform. He had a name badge on his uniform that said "Randy" and seem to have rotted teeth. Other people came to join the party but Mark felt he knew them all but did not know their names except for the mechanic named, Randy. Terri embraced them all kissing them on the cheeks laughing diabolically but Mark had no idea why. He woke up in his padded room with a small window in his door and stared at the ceiling, his head hurting waiting for sleep to take over his senses again.

Chapter Four

“Confronting Terri”

TERRI WAS VERY pleasant that afternoon, she did not look like someone who was dead or eaten alive by some monster like Mark had described in their sessions. She sat on her couch in a short skirt and had candles all over her apartment. There was something about her that seemed more dangerous than the man that lay in her hospital. Diana was through with the cat and mouse game she was playing very well and decided to cut to the chase.

“Ms. Coleman, excuse me for being blunt but I do not believe you love Mark. If you did, your cooperation in his mental health would be a priority in your life but it seems it is not.” Diana said from a chair across from where Terri sat. Terri’s smile transformed into a snarl.

“How dare you come into my home and disrespect me! Who do you think you are, you get out of my house or I will call the police” Terri stood pointing her finger at the front door. Diana sat in the chair happy the masks are finally off and they could get to business. Diana went into her purse and slammed the self help book Terri gave Mark on the coffee table.

“Anton LaVey is the author of this trash! He is the founder of the First Church of Satan and you gave this book to a young man who was looking for comfort after losing his mother? Do you know the hell you put this boy through?” Diana then stood and confronted the young woman who was supposed to be at his side.

“Love and comfort? Kindness is given to those who deserve it; love is not wasted on ingrates. This is one of our most cherished declarations in my bible. I tried helping Mark but he is too weak to embrace our religion.” Terri said.

“I will pray for you people.” Diana snapped. Terri laughed at this comment of faith and held herself at the end of the couch as she laughed uncontrollably.

“Prayers are a futile gesture my good doctor. The last time I checked this is America and we have the freedom of religion. Now I am asking you for the last time, would please mind

leaving my home?" Diana left Terri's gift to Mark on the table and grabbed her purse and walked to the front door. She did not know what answers she expected confronting Terri but she had to try. Medication and therapy was not helping and each day, a new personality would surface. She was concerned one day, Mark would never return and she could not allow that to happen. Terri stood her ground chewing on her pinky finger then finally yelled at Diana one more time.

"Doctor, tell Mark if he wants the demons to go away, our way is the way. He must embrace Satan in order to find peace instead of wasting his time in prayers of confessions and Catholic guilt over his mother's death. For what it is worth, I did love Mark, he was a good fuck. Good day doctor" Terri said with a wicked smile. Diana almost lost her temper again but the smile on Terri unnerved her. It was the most chilling smile she saw in her professional life and quickly left her home never once turning back.

Weeks have gone by as Diana and her colleagues documented Mark's personalities, testing medications and theories on him with no results. For a period of time, Diana knew more about some of his manifestations than she did on Mark himself. She constantly had to remind herself the conversations she held was not her patient. It coming to a point that Mark would rewarded to the state with no hope of recovery. His father nor did any known relatives visited Mark. He was alone and this compelled her to try even harder. Her colleagues warned her not to get too close to her patients but she had to try

One morning, Mark attacked a nurse in the community room. All the residents on his floor jump and down ranting and screaming. It was a scary scene like wild animals going wild over a kill of a prey. It took six orderlies to push their way through the crowd of cheering people to get to Nancy, a woman in her late forties who had a bloody nose and a ripped uniform. It turns out it was not Mark Bradley who committed the attack but a new personality named Ruben. It was this point on that Mark lost his privileges over the attack and remained in solitaire confinement only to be let out for restroom breaks or special sessions with the doctors which getting far and in between

simply nothing worked. The next day, Diana stared at Mark through the small window in the door. The room was dark and she heard conversations in the dark. Mark was now talking to himself or his other personalities, it was hard to tell. It was a disappointing site. She tried talking to him but he did not hear her and fear perhaps the personality of Mark was gone forever. She decided to go home that afternoon feeling not productive at all.

When she drove into her driveway she saw the mailman making his rounds a few houses down the block. She sat in a car a moment or two before turning the engine off and got out of the car waiting for the mailman to walk over to her house with her mail. The mailman was a white older gentleman with a white grey hair and had a rugged manly look to him. He had a pile of mail in his hand and was separating her mail as he approached her. He handed her mail to her and smiled and continued walking.

Diana was glancing at her mail at the front door frowning at the bills at the same time unlocking her front door with her house key. The mailman stopped walking and walked back to her. She looked puzzled at why the mailman was returning to her house and he looked stern.

"Let him go Ms. Collins. I do not know why but the Dark One wants him" the mailman said. Diana was puzzled and confused. She wanted to address her mailman but all these years she never bother to get to know his name.

"I beg your pardon" Diana snapped at the weirdness of the situation. The mailman looked around like he was being watched then smile at her.

"We are everywhere and watching you. Mark Bradley, your patient. He was chosen for a reason. He has unlocked a door neither he nor you can close. Forget him if you know what is good for you and your daughter, Elizabeth."

"You stay away from my family or I will call the police!" Diana snapped at him looking back at the front door making sure her teenage daughter was not coming to the door. The mailman nodded at her and went back to work.

"We are everywhere, good afternoon Ms. Collins" the mailman with no name said as he continued with his mail route. For the first time Diana did not feel safe and quickly went into her home and locked the front door. She plan on calling the post office to complain and ask for a new mailman but she knew her complaints were not valid nor could her prove anything that took place with the mailman. She instead found her daughter in her room doing her homework and hugged her while she made a fuss over all the attention.

"Cut it out Ma, I am not a puppy" her daughter complained but glad to see her mother home early just the same. Diana released her. She ruffled her hair and went to her office, a room next to her daughter's bedroom. It was clear satanic forces were involved with Mark but she could not explain it. This was not a scientific approach to the problem, something she had devoted her life to. Sometimes when the logical approach did not work; sometimes the illogical had to be considered. She considered consulting her priest about her concerns in a discreet way so she was not violating any privacy laws and received a religious perspective. Priests do it all the time in confessions; surely she could figure a way to ask her questions without breaching any privacy rules.

Mark Bradley surface for the first time in weeks and was surprised to find himself in darkness. His room was small and confiding and screamed for Diana Collins banging on the door but being ignored by the people in charge of his floor. She had portrayed him but at the same time he did not know where he went. It felt like he was asleep for a long time. He saw visions of the book Terri gave him as the pages talked to him. He closed his eyes and still saw the pages of the occult book in his mind's eye. For the first time, he realized the book he studied and practiced for the sake of retaining Terri's love seemed wrong. Why didn't he see that before? He opened his eyes and adjusted his vision in the dark feeling the walls for any way out of the room. As he felt the rubber walls, a claw shot out of the wall and grabbed his wrists. He screamed in futile attempts and

felt more claws shooting out of the floor grabbing his ankles and dragging him to the ground.

More claws came out of the darkness clawing at his clothes, then his flesh. Evil laughter and growls echoed in the room and more claws groped him. They ripped his clothes off until he was naked. *“You came into this world naked and you shall leave this world naked.”* Mark thought to himself in a panic moment. The claws torn into his flesh deeper and Mark felt a sharp hot flash of pain. Mark screamed for another ten minutes while the demons slashed at his body then room became very silent.

The following morning, Diana Collins had scheduled to see her priest for counselor. She received a telephone call from the hospital and was shocked to learn Mark Bradley had died in his sleep.

“He just did not want to live anymore and the good Lord took him away” the nurse said on the telephone. Diana decided to take the rest of the afternoon off and let the staff attend Mark. She called his father on her way to her church. There was no remorse in his voice and acted like the local library called to tell him he had a library book that was past due. It was simply stunning to see such apathy towards your own flesh and blood.

She thought of the waste of life and cussed to herself for getting close to a patient. She cried as she drove to her church which was located four miles away. Her church was a majestic building with icons of her faith, Jesus on the cross, promising man of everlasting life as long one believed in Him. Perhaps, it was time for her to give science and medicine a rest for a while and embrace her faith for once.

She parked her car and approached the church. She liked the painted windows showing stages of Jesus’ life on earth. She tipped her finger into a small bowl of holy water at the entranceway of the church and did the “sign of the cross” by touching her forehead, her stomach, then her left shoulder then her right.

Sister Maria, one of the nuns at her church was changing the church bulletin when Diana entered the church. Sister Maria, a short husky woman that Diana has seen for years coming to her church smile when she saw Diana enter the church.

"Morning child, how may I assist you" the nun said as she approached Diana in her black traditional church habit. The nun realized Diana was crying and quickly put her arm around her, patting her head in comfort.

"Now, now, do not cry my dear. You in the House of the Lord where there is no sorrow only joy in God's love" the nun assured.

"I am okay Sister, I just need to talk to Father Simmons" Diana said sobbing still over Mark's death.

"Of course my child. Father Simmons is at the pulpit preparing for this morning's mass but of course you may approach him" Sister Maria said guiding Diana through the majestic double doors that lead to the worship area of the church. Diana smiled and saw Father Simmons reading over his notes and looked up and saw Diana approach him. Diana looked back and saw Sister Maria closing the doors behind her. Diana smiled weakly and walked towards her priest.

Behind the closed doors, Sister Maria walked to a dark corner of the entryway of the church and took out her cell phone. She made a quick telephone call. Her kindness left her features immediately as she spoke.

"The bitch is talking to Father Simmons now. It will be only a matter of time before she is ours." Sister Maria said with a grin. She waited for further instructions from the person at the other end of the telephone.

"That will not be a problem. Absolutely. Hail Satan" Sister Maria said with an orgasmic tone and hung up on the telephone. She went back to the double doors and looked inside and saw Father Simmons hugging Diana Collins and the nun's smile widen.

The End

“The Church, The Devil, and Me”

September 16

Hello dear Journal. My name is Tim Murray. I live in Simi Valley, California a small town surrounded by mountains. Just south of us is the valley better known as the San Fernando Valley and keep going south, you have Los Angeles. Today in American Literature class, we were assigned to write a diary. Diary for guys? Gim'me a break, I told my teacher; that is so gay. The guys in the classroom agreed while the girls in the class room giggled. I was making a valid point for all of teenage boys across America; it was simply too gay.

“Consider it a journal, journaling is a good way to express your inner thoughts and generate your creativity” my teacher said. I remember all the guys groaning from the class me included but in order to get a passing grade, we had to journal our thoughts on a daily basis. At the end of the month, we had to turn in our journals and the teacher would check to see we had thirty days in our book then we had to write an essay about the experience. So in an effort to keep my parents proud, here we go my friend, The Journal.

Who am I? For starters, I have one sister named Ann and four brothers, I am the youngest. The oldest brother is Thomas, and then there is Edward, Patrick, and Drew. My brothers are very macho and so is my sister for that matter. I suppose she has to be in order to survive in a household of five brothers.

Thomas is ten years older than me and he is already dating multiple girls. My brothers tease him and call him Jack Tripper from *“Three’s Company”*; one of my favorite TV Sitcoms. That show rocks! Edward is cool. He likes to wrestle with me, he is strong as an ox and we call him Hoss from *“Bonanza”*. Patrick is the clown among us and you guess it we call him Ralph Mouth from *“Happy Days”*. There is Drew and he is the smart one considering how young he is. We call him Albert Einstein and he likes to brag at least he has his nick name from a real person and from a person not from a television show. Ann being aggressive for a girl is called Diana Prince from my favorite show, *“Wonder Woman”*. Okay, I can tell this school

assignment is going to be lame and it going to be a long month. Bye for now.

September 18

This is total crap. Are you reading this page dear teacher? I cannot watch television until I write something in this dumb book. I hate school so much. I can hear Patrick and Drew laughing, their cackles are so addictive. I want to see what is being watched on TV. Screw it, I am done.

September 23

Today, I came home from school so scared. I want to talk to my parents but they seem so overwhelm with problems at work. Today, I had three guys corner me in the hallway and wanted my lunch money which I told I had none because I brought my lunch. The one person shoved me into the lockers and the pain from my back hitting the combination lock hurts even now. I want to beat the crap out of them so bad but how can I? I never have been in a fight and when I tried to cuss at them they made fun of my lisp which made me even madder. I suppose I do not have a very good lion's roar when I sound like a kitten. School sucks.

October 20

Has it really been this long since I wrote in my journal? My school assignment is almost due and I have no entries in this damn book. I do not know why I am writing in this book still when I know there is no why I will pass this assignment. I suppose I could write a huge amount of pages and change the dates but I do not feel like doing that. This last month has been rough. I feel myself changing inside and my parents tell me that is all part of growing up, hormones are changing inside you, you becoming a man, blah blah, yida yida.

My mom says I cannot go trick or treating this year, that I am too old for Halloween so I have no idea what I am going to do. Perhaps, I will try scaring the little kids with one of my werewolf

Halloween masks while my mom hands out candy; that would be so cool. It has been a hard day at school and writing this page has helped maybe my teacher was onto something.

November 1

Okay, I failed my assignment but who cares. I am continuing to journal though so you and I my friend are going to be good friends. I must admit the teacher was right. I am going to make a point to get her in my next semester if all possible. Halloween was a blast. It turns out my mom agree to pass out candy while I hid in the bushes and jump out growling in my werewolf mask. A mother and her nine year daughter dropped her daughter's hand and yelled "fuck!" It was so funny. After they left my mom and I laughed so hard, I almost peed in my pants. So I was too fat and too tall to go trick or treating but I think scaring people on Halloween is so much entertaining. I have a new Halloween tradition now. Insert evil laugh here. Ha Ha.

November 8

I got a hard on in the boys locker room today. What the hell is that all about? I must get out of gym class now. I do not know why my body is not responding to my commands. Thank God, none of the guys saw this. I am no queer!

November 9

I feel myself changing. Have I changed or have I always been this way? Looking back in my past I see the signs and chalk it up as an awkward boy stage. I will grow out of it I kept on telling myself. Today is my biggest challenge, checking out books at the school library. Am I gay? "One out of Every Six" was the title and Mrs. Huffman, our school librarian looked at the title of the book then lower her glasses to get a better look at me then made a grunt of disgust. I kept on thinking if she was so repulse of gay people why was this book in the school library? Nevertheless, I felt so worthless and alone for the first time in my world. I thought of confiding in my brothers but such attempts would be useless. I hid the book in the very same werewolf mask I wore last Halloween knowing my mom would

not snoop near a holiday decoration. I am so smart. I am so gay. No I am not. I am going through a phase and nothing more.

April 10

Hello Dear Friend. You have been lost for many years now and I have been so scared you would fall into the wrong hands. If Drew, Patrick, Thomas, or God Forbid my parents found you, my darkest fears would be brought out of the darkness into the light. No matter now. What has happened in the world since my last entries? Last week was a shocker for us all. March 30, 1981 to be exact, President Reagan was shot while walking to his limousine after giving a speech in Washington D.C. by a gunman named John Hinckley. My world is changing. Hard to believe someone would do this then again look at Lincoln. Hello? Is anyone home? Has Jr. High not taught you anything Mr.Tim?

I will admit I am no Reagan fan. AIDS has gripped the country killing all the gay people and some straight people too but the media does not focus on those folks. *"It is a gay disease"* my Dad tells me. *"It is about time, God kills faggots; it is His way of pulling weeds from the garden"* my mother says to the television. Millions have died in the United States and the Reagan Administration has not addressed this crisis, it is unbelievable. The last I heard Reagan is okay but to be frank I do not care and I do not care to mention this to anymore in fear of being called un-American.

I do not have to have sex to be happy in this world. I will take my secret to the grave but I have a need to write in these pages because this is my only salvation. It is not right for a person to go through this world pretending to be someone else to please the masses, it is not right at all but what choice do I have? They say it is a choice but I did not choose to be gay! It sucks, no pun intended.

March 17

Happy Saint Patrick's Day my journal friend. Saint Patrick can kiss my ass. Today, I was kissed but what did I expect? I wore a green shirt with a shamrock on the front that said, "kiss me I'm Irish" and I got kiss by a guy named Nick Tuttle, the hottest guy in school, a real ladies man but his kiss was nothing but sexual but a kiss of death. He gave me a quick kiss on the forehead then punched me so hard I fell over. He made some comments about "faggot" and he went back to the pack of wolves, I mean boys and they were all laughing at me while I knelt down on my knees gasping for air. How did they know? I do not know. My family does not know. I did not tell anyone. Can they tell and my family cannot? I am so paranoid now, I feel myself withdrawing from people. Girls and guys are now making fun of me on a regular basis. I am either too fat, I am retarded because of my lisp or I am simply a queer. I said it before and I will say it again, school sucks.

June 16

None of my so called friends want to be friends with me anymore. What gives? We are graduating high school this month and we are going our separate ways it seems. "Thanks for filling up my calendar during the school days and now I am off to make my mark on the world and have a good life." People are strange, I supposed people come and go in your life but I had no idea it would happen so fast. I am glad my tortured school years are now over. I had a happy childhood but looking through these pages it seems it is nothing but pain. I suppose that is what journaling is about, writing the bad and not the good to get out all that negative energy.

June 15

Hello dear journal. You are indeed like a boomerang that tends to get lost and comes back into my life. I met to write so much in this journal but could not find it. I found you among my high school yearbook in a shoebox underneath my bed along with many dust bunnies. Oh my God, has it been a year already? I must write some interesting adventures in this book for my time capsule but I am afraid I have nothing to contribute. Thomas got married to a woman named Terry. She is a nice girl, likes to

spend a lot of time in the bathroom brushing her hair which is amusing to me. She is your typical valley girl with her, "Oh My God, I am so sure, like for sure." At least she is not saying, "that is so gay" or "do not be gay, that's stupid." Ann is working for a bank as a branch manager handling loans and checking accounts and all that fun banking stuff. Drew went off to college which I knew my older brother Einstein would. He reminds me of those aliens from the original "*Star Trek*" show with William Shanter, the aliens with the huge heads with the veins pulsating in their foreheads, my brother the brain. Edward is dating a nice girl also, her name is Sharon I think, I met her once at a family get together. Everyone is hooking up except yours truly. I can feel the pressure as the months go by. I do not date and everyone is trying to fix me up so I can also live happier and after like my siblings. What is the highlight of my life for the year since I wrote in you my journal friend? Nothing much. I can tell you my junior high school American Literature teacher would be proud that to this day I am still writing in my journal. What started out as a school assignment which I failed as I recalled became a regular thing for me from time to time.

So what is new with me? Nothing new except they have a spined off of "*Star Trek*" called "*Star Trek: The Next Generation*" that is premiering on television tonight and I have my video recorder set to record the show. I am going to watch this show since I am trekkie but I like William Shanter and I resent someone trying to replace him. I will give the show a try. Boy, is this the best I can come up to justify my time on this earth? A tv show, that is so sad but it is true. This is my excitement in life, so I am easy to please. It is getting harder and harder to come up with excuses for not dating. It is getting so old and makes it so much easier just to disappear off the face of the earth but I cannot do that. It is lonely though having no friends and no dates. I feel I am wasting my youth away about this gay thing. It is obvious to me it is no longer a Freudian stage that I was suppose to outgrow. Hell, I am 20 now and I know Ann, she is probably planning my 21st birthday probably with a cake with boobs. Yum Yum.

The good news I start a new job next week in a call center for Great Western Bank located in Chatsworth. Yes, I am following in big sister's footsteps as the next banker in the family. It is not a far drive from Lancaster. Oh, I forget to tell you my dear reader of the future. I am no longer living in Simi Valley but moved to Lancaster in the Antelope Valley. This is the town with lots and lots of wind and dust but hell the rent is cheap. Gotta run now, I hear my microwave going off and my TV dinner is ready and I am starving. Good night.

July 21

This job sucks but I need the money. I was on the phone with this customer for an half hour trying to explain to her why the bank had returned her check for non sufficient funds. You opened your account with \$100.00 and wrote three checks, one for \$50.00 and another one for \$100.00 and she cannot understand why the bank did not honor her check. Some people should just not have checking accounts. I change my mind on that; some people should not be allowed to breed. It is funny how office politics play in the corporate world. I feel like I am in high school all over again. They are the good looking employees who hang out in sections of the lunch room and there are the geeks like myself sitting in the lunch room all by their self with no one to talk to. I tried introducing myself to people but they look at you like you are asking them to have sex with you and they walk away as to say, "fat chance I will be caught speaking to a loser like you." Some things do not change.

July 22

I sat alone again today in the lunch room. A woman named Kathy Raid was sitting at a table and actually got up and went to another table when I sat down at the same table. Excuse me bitch, I am not interested. People are getting to me.

July 31

I am not sure if I am going to last at this job. My supervisor Gary is already giving me a hard time stating I need to keep my talk time down and I need to speak slower in order for customers to understand me. I hate it here but this is all I know.

August 2

I met a co worker today. I was eating my lunch and he came up to me. He is very cute. He kinda reminds me of Bruce Willis from that television show, “*Moonlighting*” Why is he talking to me though? I am not among the cool, the good looking, the liked. Dude, you must be new to town, I am part of the geek squad, you are looking for the popular, the funny, the desired group at the other side of the lunch room. He sat next to me and introduced himself.

“Hi, my name is Dale Naiditch. We worked in the same department; I am on George’s team. George is another manager in the department where Gary was my supervisor. I noticed you are new here and you sit alone. I could use a friend myself because no one talks to me because I believe in Jesus.”

Dale has the kindest eyes, his eyes sparkled when he said the Lord’s name and I instantly felt a connection with him. I remembered I said something to the effect, “that people can talk about the devil all the time but as soon you mention God or Jesus, people freak out and it was not right.” Of course, I did not tell him my fascination with horror movies or Halloween. Then again, I could blame my mom on that one. She got me hooked on Halloween because I was forbidden to go trick or treating, I mused myself with. Dale was cool though, another misfit among Great Western Bank. How about that? Perhaps this is going to be a good week after all. Life was staring to look up for me.

August 3

Dale sat next to me again next to lunch and he had his bible with him. He did not talk about Jesus or anything but I could not help but notice, all the time he was talking to me, he was holding his bible with the tips of his fingers like it was a safety blanket, like Linus holds his blanket in that Peanuts cartoon strip I read in the Sunday paper. It feels nice being wanted and interesting for someone to spend so much time with me. For the first time, I do not feel like a misfit or even a gay man. I feel

clean for the first time. Dale must be projecting some good vibes this way. He is a little strange bringing his bible to work but then who am I to judge? I am a gay man and in the closet no less.

October 25

My favorite holiday is less the six days away and this year's Halloween Yard Haunt is being host at Edward's house. He is a good sport and allows me to decorate his front yard with a graveyard, zombies, and all the fun creatures of the night to scare trick or treaters. I tried asking Dale if he wanted to help and for some strange reason, he would not talk to me for the whole week. He almost seemed sad and like he had pity for me. I do not understand his emotions but if he wanted space so be it; it is Halloween and the show must go on. In another place and another time, I knew I would be a horror movie director, like George Romero or Stephen King but since that is never going to happen, I release my creativity and imagination on Ole Hallows Eve. Gotta run and start building my props.

Nov 1

There is a pamphlet on my desk that states "Jesus Loves You". I am outraged at this and I should not be. Does Jesus really love me? He made me gay so he can condemn me. I certainly did not choose to be gay. I suddenly feel unclean and convicted. I can feel it. I was going to my supervisor to complain when I feel a hand on my shoulder. I turn around and see Dale and then I got a call from a customer. He smiled at me and made a gesture to call me with his hand. I felt a ting of excitement in me, a feeling I can only wonder when a straight boy meets a straight girl he likes and I cannot help myself. Dear Journal, I think I found Mr. Right but I do not know if he feels the same way. I am so confused. I realized that I do not have Dale's number so I shoot him a quick email asking him, you want me to call you? A few minutes, I get a email back from Dale and I am excited at what words he may convey to me especially when I think I might have ticked him off with my Halloween festivities. I clicked on the email and he had one line which has me puzzled even as I write this. Oh yeah, I forgot. What did his reply say? It said the following;

"No. Do not call me. Call Jesus."

Nov 12

Dale finally approached me today after the meeting about some damn new checking account product. He slipped me a note and part of me felt like a school girl passing a note in class. It said:

ACT 2:38

I have no idea what that means so I need to talk to Dale when the time is right, does not seem right to do this shit in the workplace. On another note, I am really enjoying the new Star Trek show. Patrick Stewart is not reprising William Shanter's role of Captain Kirk but a new captain called Picard. Interesting. I thought the show was a remake but it's definitely a spin off. The ride to work seems to be getting to me. It is almost one hour and a half one way to work and it is driving me crazy. GWB, that's my acronym for Great Western Bank does have a city bus that picks a bus load of employees at a park and swap so I may explore that at a later time. Mom and Dad are coming over for dinner to check out my new pad. Money is tight so I do not dare tell them I am losing weight not because of exercising but because I am living off macaroni and cheese. I am going to use my credit card and buy a platter or something at Subway's or something. I will have to think of something. The biggest pain is taking my large picture of a shirtless stud in a football uniform and replacing it with Cheryl Ladd or something. It is getting so old to "de gay" my apartment every time someone comes over; it is so easy just not to invite anyone. I have no idea what ACT 2:38 means, it is really bugging me.

Nov 13

I am so tired of life now. I am so horny. Hell, I am so lonely. I should write more to get these negative feelings but why bother.

Nov 14

I do not why I bother writing in this damn book. This is just making me depress and realize how mean less my life really is. I feel so alone and empty inside.

Dec 10

If I hear one more Christmas carol on the radio, I think I really will go mad. At least Dale agrees with me. Yes, we are talking again, we have a strange friendship. We will talk and be the best of friends and then we will not talk for weeks on end. I want to approach him but will not give him the satisfaction. That is the stubbornness in me. You are bullheaded just like your mother old man. Ha Ha. Dale was nice enough to help me with the new computer system we had our training on. I am not the sharpest tool in the shed, I will admit but once I get it, I am gold. Dale was cool enough to help me. I need to give the man some slack with his bible preaching, he is not such a bad guy. In the lunch room, he heard Linda and Marah singing to a tune of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer like they were in some karaoke bar and they were all laughing. I suppose it was getting addictive because I found myself humming to the Christmas carols being played lightly over the speakers. Dale seemed concerned with this and told me that is not right.

He told me "Jesus is the reason for the season". Santa Claus was a tool of the devil. You take the word Santa and change the words around and it spelled SATAN. He wore a red suit and took the focus off the baby Jesus. I laughed at this and thought he was crazy and I remembered getting dirty looks from the Marah and Linda thinking I was laughing at them. Dale looked alarmed being spotted by Linda and Marah and then asked me if I could give him a ride home which I said I would.

When I saw his apartment, I was shocked and disgusted. He was renting a room and the people that lived with him were obviously on drugs. Pizza boxes with rotting food on the coffee table and cans of beer everywhere. Dale went to get himself a soda and turned on the light and that is when I saw cock roaches about twenty of them scatter for shelter. I let out a scream and Dale laughed and usher me into his room while the

low life roommates went to see what the racket was. I was so embarrassed but mostly scared I let the gay side of me out of the closet.

Dale did not think so, he chuckled and told me to never mind and escorted me into his room. His room consisted of a mattress on the floor, his clothes in the closet, a small lamp, and a junky dresser and a CD player with his gospel music CD cases all over the floor. I will admit I was shock that this kind hearted man would live like this. This was one step closer to being homeless; it was simply gross and not right. He seemed happy though so maybe there was something to his religion. Being a catholic obvious did not do me any good. The Pope was always saying how bad gays are and must be punish so I felt no spiritual refuge in the Catholic church. Dale is my friend and I kept on pushing him away. He needed a friend and not just a lunch buddy at work and that is when I offer him to move into my apartment with me. He could stay with me, save some money and put a down payment on a decent place instead of living in this pit. Dale hugged me he was so happy and I felt so good. It feels good to be wanted. It felt good to see the joy in his eyes. Praise God.

Dec 15

Dale made some Greek meal that I cannot spell in this journal but it was so good. I must make an effort to ask him what it is. Dale and I went and got our Christmas tree today. This feels so right, feels like we are a couple. I will admit I feel like I am having feelings for him but do not know if he feels the same. We have been reading the bible more and more often together but I have not yet gone to his church in the valley. We decorated the tree but for some reason he would not touch any of the non Christmas tree ornaments. He hung up the angels and the Jesus figures I had passed down from my family but I also had a Superman and Batman Christmas tree ornament that he made a point not to touch. I wanted to say something but simply did not want to ruin the moment. Dale was drinking a little wine and looked real relax. He was lying on the coach with his legs spread and watched me decorate the tree. He had a nice smile and I could tell he wanted to say something to me.

"Tim, we know each other for a while now. We are friends right?" I recall him saying with a slur in his voice from the wine coolers we were drinking. Dale was going to come out of the closet and our relationship would be official, I knew it. I felt aroused and excited at his words then I noticed he fell asleep. Now, I have to wait till tomorrow to find out what he wanted to say. It is getting late now and I have to finish tonight's entries tomorrow.

Dec 16

What the hell? What the freakin hell? I feel dumb founded. I am confused. I am perplexed. I feel foolish. I approach Dale to find out what he wanted to say last night. He told me what I waited for him to say. He went on to say, he loved me as a brother but he could no longer be my friend unless he knew I was saved. He went on to tell me there is a street made of gold in heaven for me. If I am not saved he could no longer appoint his time in me unless I got baptized and was saved in his church. He took out his bible and reminded me of ACT 2:38 and that is when I found out it was a biblical scripture which read as follows:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Okay, I read over the bible to make sure I wrote this down correctly and that is it. So I went get baptized in his church, what could it hurt? I do not understand this crap but if it's important to my friend then so be it. Dale made a point he did not like my family that they are non believers and the only way they could be save is for someone else to witness to them. Witness is talking to a non believer about the Word of God and no one will believe you because you are family. I prayed a lot that night hoping someone would witness my family so they too can be saved. It was set, Dale told me he spoke to his pastor and he would be there along with the congregation for my rebirth. He patted me on the shoulder and told me to have a good night "Brother Tim" because tomorrow night would be the first day of my new life, a new life of a man of God.

Dec 17

I feel myself changing and I cannot put my finger on it. I wanted to talk to my parents of my rebirth but they do not understand so this was a journey I would experience on my own. I will admit, I was scared, scared of the attention. I had to stripped down to my underwear and put on the baptism robe. When I was ready for the ceremony two good looking men, one that just looked like he graduated high school and another one that was old enough to be my father came into the stage area when I was waiting further instructions. I could see the pastor from behind the curtains but could not see into the audience due to the bright state lights shining on the pastor. I did not get a chance to meet him yet and my first meeting with him was on stage but I trusted in Dale. He is my friend. I felt like a movie star or a sacrifice lamb walking out that stage and felt very cold. After all I was just wearing my underwear under that white gown. I remember the pastor having rosy cheeks like Santa Claus or someone who has been drinking as he said a few inspirational words about a lost sheep coming back to the flock. Dale placed his hand on my back as well as the two other men and felt excited not sexually actually but excited just the same. I was lowered into the water and came up with my vision blurred. The pastor told me to praise Jesus and I said "AMEN" with a quizzical tone in my voice and the men suddenly broke down in praise and dance.

I will admit I was kinda bummed because they said I was speaking in tongues whatever that meant. I was not speaking in tongues but they said they did and who was I to question a man of God. They were all talking so fast, I felt like I was at an auction and the faces beyond the lights began to raise their hands into the air praising someone but I could not make out who. I will also admit that is when I felt like a fat seal in water and when I stood up, the men and Dale rushed me off stage and provided me a towel and my clothes for to change back into. It was the most bizarre experience I have ever went through but Dale was so happy now, so happy with me, our friendship will be forever now.

Dale later introduced me to the rest of the brothers and sisters of the church. They were so interesting. Some were former drug addicts, some stole, and others slept around. There were no gay people among the flock so I might be a welcome outcast when I decided to finally come out of the closet. I had to think this through but the last thing on my mind was facing my inner demons, I am so happy to have Dale in my life and all the wonderful family that went with the package of being Dale's friend. Praise Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Dec 20

Ann came over my apartment today to go Christmas shopping. Ann is so much fun to go shopping with especially during the sales. I remember one year on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, my sister and I went shopping. It was like in a Nascar drag race with our shopping carts racing down the aisles throwing everything in the cart to sort out later at the check-out. She is so much fun. She said I was acting strange and it is just like my sister to be jealous of my happiness. I was looking so forward to go shopping with her but she made Dale feel uncomfortable and he ran back in the bedroom. So we did not go Christmas shopping that day, so what, no big deal. It is not like we are kids anymore, she has her life, and I have mine. Simple.

Dale later told me that angels were protecting us this day. I could not understand his logic until we sat and pray over the events of the afternoon. Buying presents for family and friends at Christmas is not what Christmas is all about. I knew this, I seen "*A Charlie Brown Christmas*" and remembered the speech of Linus on the school stage. I can hear that speech now.

"Sure Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about. Lights Please..." and so on. But seriously, Dale told me to be more faithful to the church and money spent on Christmas was a sin and that money should be applied to the church so the church could spread God's will. Made sense to me but I was already done with most of my shopping anyway so I would consider this next year. I would pray over the decision to return the presents for cash or give to my family this Christmas later. Dale also told me that next time family comes over especially a

woman, to warn him since he was wearing a short sleeve shirt and shorts. I could not understand this and he explained to me it is ungodly to show flesh so one could be seduced to thoughts of the flesh. He would have put on a long sleeve shirt if he knew my sister was coming over.

If he only knew what ungodly thoughts I had of him walking around in my apartment in his shorts or the dreams I wake up with him fresh in my mind._ *“Sins of the flesh will condemn your soul Brother Tim he told me. You cannot even jerk off to your thoughts. The only way to true happiness in life is to pray to God for happiness. You must marry a woman from the Church that has the same values as us. If you try to hook up with a woman outside the Church, you will surely be on the road to hell and damnation because no woman in the outside world follows God’s rules.”*

“Rules? I do not understand Brother Dale” I asked him. This is the shocker to me my journal friend.

Dale told me my sister Ann is ungodly. Ann? I had to laugh. She is a peacemaker and has a good heart. She is a little self-centered but then again who is perfect. He explained to me Ann’s haircut, her short hair cut is against God and is an abomination. We prayed over this and here is the verse in the bible we prayed over. I am writing here in my journal for my sister when I see her next because I will not remember this.

Cor 11:5,6

“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.”

Shorn means “cut at all” as Dale explained it to me so this is why my dear sister is going to hell now for going to SuperCuts. I am forbidden to talk to her about this revelation but instead I will pray another soldier of God will approach her. That is enough writing for now dear journal. I hear Dale calling out to me from

the living room; he thinks I am praying and does not realize I am writing in my journal. Praise Jesus.

Dec 25

All that talk about Christmas from Dale and I am going to my parents after all. At least I do not have to deal with Dale with my small token gifts for my family. It is Christmas and I must not feel this way but I do. I feel betrayed. Dale and I were supposed to spend Christmas together but he now has a girlfriend named Robin. Funny, he told me he was not sexually attracted to her but she is strong in the Spirit. He is spending Christmas with her at the Church with the rest of the brothers and sisters. I am supposed to go there this afternoon but I am not. I am just pissed, I admit it.

Dec 26

Dale did not home last night. He said he spent the night at the Church in the spare bedroom. We did not talk today at work and we sat at different tables at lunch today. I can feel the tension.

Jan 5

Another year has gone by and Dale and I are talking again. Today is the day I am going to tell him my true feeling to him. It is the only way I will know where I stand with him. After dinner, I told him I wanted to talk to him but before I said anything, he wanted to talk to me. He then told me about Robin and him were thinking of getting married and that is when my world collapse. Do not get me wrong, I am happy for him but I am bummed. Suddenly, my telephone rings and it is Robin. She wants to talk to me. I did not want to talk to Robin but lately our prayer sessions with Dave was getting more difficult. She is powerful in the tongue. I will admit, Robin's voice was very seductive, almost sounded like a sex operator but what she said shocked me.

"The demon of Homosexuality has you Brother Tim. Dale and I pray for you and the angels spoke to us."

"God made Adam and Eve," she said. "He made a woman to be with a man, and a man to be with a woman."

“You have an unclean spirit attacking your soul Brother Tim and you will be under attack until you defeat this thing. Let’s pray together.”

I hung up the phone and told Dale to get out. He did not fight me this time and said he would come later for his things.

Jan 6

A telephone message on my answering machine from Dale. It seems my journal is nothing but Dale now. I feel being watched now. My neighbor told me there are strange people hanging around my apartment snooping. They took off when she tried to confront them. I feel so empty inside, no longer the euphoria feeling I had this last year. I cannot enjoy television; well it is a devil box as it was called. So many scriptures distorted in my mind, contradicting everything I learned as a Catholic boy. One thing is for certain now, I am going to Hell unless I get right with God and only Dale can save me now.

Jan 19

Dale responded to a work email I sent him asking for us to meet at my apartment. Dale agreed and was happy that I was coming back to God. I thought my re-born experience was extraordinary but this night is when everything went to pot. Dale cooked his famous Greek meal and I still do not know the name of this dish and after dinner we took a ride into the dessert night in Lancaster. Did I tell you I live in Lancaster, CA? I cannot remember what I wrote in these pages over the month.

Lancaster is a small town next to Palmdale and as you head north, there are no towns and the night sky comes to life. It is beautiful and you can appreciate God’s handiwork, the stars are plentiful. Dale and I talked out our differences and he gave me a hug. He joked it was not sexual but brotherly love and that felt good just the same. He told me that he would help cure me but in order to get close to God, I had to commit myself to His Will. So we drove my car off the freeway into a deserted dirt road. Dave was singing and talking in tongues praising Jesus that I was no longer backsliding. Backsliding means turning my back on God, I am not sure if I explained that in my previous pages.

I parked the car in the middle of nowhere and stepped out of my car, keys in ignition still while Dale sat there in a trance praising Jesus. I remember walking in the desert admiring the cactuses and the fresh air. The stars were clear now in the sky and I could even see the “little dipper” and Lancaster was far from my sight, a small light in the distance. I remember seeing Dale in the car that was a small light in the distance as I walked further away from the car, his praising a mild whisper at this point.

Suddenly, I heard a rustle in the distance behind a bush and I will admit this freaked me out and dismissed it as a jack rabbit or some other critter. Then without warning, my head exploded with a loud roar, like the sound of a stereo on full blast and the volume was low and someone just turned off the mute button.

I shit you not, my dear journal friend, I think I am losing it. I jumped out of my skin and did not know what that sound was. Did I hear that or was that in my head? Then he spoke to me. *“We have come for you. God cannot save you”* the voice said. My hairs on the back of my neck stood as I felt someone or something standing behind me breathing down my neck. I did not say a word but thought, “I do not believe in you.” The voice then said, *“Prove your faith and look me in the eyes and then deny me? I dare you to turn around and face me, look me in the eyes if you dare”*.

Without ever saying a word to this thing, I bolted for my car running for my life never once looking behind me. I felt or sensed someone or something chasing me from behind but I did not have the courage to look back. I heard this maniacal laughter coming from behind me as I ran for my life. My car was my safety. The car’s dome light came into view as I ran closer to it. As I ran, I saw the car getting closer and vaguely saw Dale in the car with his eyes closed praising Jesus with the palms of his hands facing the car headliner. I jumped in the car startling Dale and he cursed for the first time since I knew him. I slammed the door, locking the doors at the same time, shifted the car in drive and did a three sixty kicking up dust and sped towards the main road that would lead me to the freeway. It was the scariest

moment of my life but the freakiest thing was what Dale said to me.

"You were attacked by the Devil out there weren't you?" I looked at him stunned at his words. How could he have known? There was no one out there in the desert. I planned this trip at the last moment, not Dale. How could he have pulled off this stunt? Then it occurred to me, it was the Devil.

"The Devil does not like you getting close to God; that is why you are being attacked Brother Tim. When you are doing your Halloween Haunted House, when you are watching the devil box you called television, when you are listening to your ungodly music like Olivia Newton-John, Pat Benatar, and all that trash from people that do not use their God given talents to worship God by singing gospel music, spending all your time with your family." Dale said ranting. I am so freaked out I told him to shut up and then he went off.

"Take me back to your apartment Brother! I am through with you. Do not talk to me at work, do not call me. What do you want with me? You called me? I cannot save you only God can and unless you devote yourself to God everyday instead of wasting your time with your family. You think your Dad loves you? Would your biological father die for your sins? No but Jesus did! You are under attack and unless you arm yourself with the Word of God you will continued to be attacked until your soul is so damned you will be tossed into the lake of fire!"

Dale went on and on quoting scriptures like I can quote lines from my Star Trek episodes but I cannot remember everything he told me to write in this journal. One thing is for certain, I am alone now.



Jan 20

I am being watched.

Jan 21

I made a scene at work today with Dale and I know it looked like disgruntled lovers to the rest of the team. I was told by my supervisor to keep personal issues out of the workplace. The same cool guys I wanted to impress when I first started here are now laughing at me even more now. I am thinking of quitting this damn job but need Dale to help me first. The incidents in my life are getting worst but he will not return my calls or give me spiritual advice. None of the brothers and sisters even the pastor will acknowledge me now, just stare at me with pity like a bleeding sheep and the hungry wolf is zoning in on me for the kill. Fuck you all!

Jan 25

I saw it. Oh dear sweet Jesus, I saw it. I was watching Star Trek at 6pm shortly after I came home from work, eating a TV dinner nuked in the microwave. I first heard a squeaking sound like a small mouse then in the corner of my eye from my bedroom to the bathroom, a tall figure ran by. The best way I can describe it as a 7 foot thing of the *Tweedy Bird* from the *Looney Tunes* cartoons I grew up with. Looney Tunes, isn't that ironic? Its arms were held like a praying mantis swinging them back and forth and took very small steps shuffling its feet at great speed. In seconds, it ran and I literally spilled my dinner all over the floor as I jumped up in shock. I slowly walked towards the bathroom when the thing ran knowing in my adult mind there was no such thing but at the same time I could not deny my senses. I walked into the bathroom and turned on the light to an empty restroom. I moved the shower curtain to see if this thing was hiding there in the tub just like a little boy checking for monsters that live in the closet of a child's imagination. It was crazy. What brought this delusion on? I

hardly think the starship Enterprise is a horror movie to work ones imagination.

Jan 25

It's three o' clock in the morning exactly and I should make a warm cup of milk to help me sleep but instead I am writing in this journal again. I have to write, get this crap out of me or I swear to God I will go mad. The *Tweedy Bird* thing returned again tonight. I am not sure if this is the same thing that tried coming for me but there is an evil in this apartment now, I can feel it. My eyes opened and I saw something standing in the doorway of my bedroom just standing there watching me. It was so very cold in the room and I felt goose bumps on my skin even with blankets all over me. I blinked my eyes to chase away the shadows and the thing was still there and in a flash, the thing ran squeaking like it did earlier and appeared at my side. I turned on the night lamp to confront my intruder and I was alone in the room.

I am not going into work tomorrow, screw the job, I cannot function and feel I need salvation but I do not know what to do.

Jan 26

I love my mom, she is the best. She did not mention anything about Dale. I know my Mom very well and knew she had an instant dislike to the man but did not want to push me away when I finally said I had made a friend and I was happy with the church. I wanted to tell her about my experiences, about me being gay but knew this is not the time. For now, I was just happy to have a sleep over guest. My parents were fighting again so this was perfect timing to convince my mom to come over for dinner and a sleep over. I cannot type too much tonight because I do not want my mom to know I have been journaling since junior high. It is not just the unthinkable of this journal being discovered but I do not want to live through one of her

famous “I told you so” songs. Good night my good listener journal for now.

Jan 27

I have to tell her, I have to tell my mom. She felt something. She slept on the couch and she said she felt a presence. She thinks Dale left an bad imprint on my once happy home and she said she would go to church and get some holy water and bless my home. That is my mother, the devoted Christian. I will admit; I am profoundly freaking out now and cannot wait for her return with this holy water even though I am trying not to look surprise or concerned. Why didn't I think of that?

It has been a couple of hours already and my mom has not returned. I noticed it is getting dark and I remembered Dale telling me, I must arm myself with the Truth. I took out the bible and started reading. The bible states that your faith and devotion to God is the only protection from demon attacks.

I hate God for making me gay. I hate Him for allowing me to be born in a world where everyone hates you. I did not ask for this. I did not choose. I prayed for to be straight. Hell, I even tried kissing a girl in high school and got sick to my stomach. I do not know what to do. I find myself crying now as I write this entry in my journal. I wished my mom would come back soon. She said she felt being watched and thought she saw a midget run by the hallway. By all means it is not my *Tweedy Bird* but what was it that she saw? Perhaps, it was another demon that came for my soul?

I get a call from my mom a hour later stating she is no longer mad at dad and she had returned home. I want to yell what about the holy water and now realize it is too late to go the church myself. The only Catholic church, that I knew was on Palmdale Blvd. I smile in my voice to ensure my mom everything is fine but I feel the panic coming in. I want to call Dale, he will know what to do but I cannot bring myself to call him. He will be with Robin and both of them will be laughing at the condemned gay soul.

Jan 27

Midnight, the same damn day. I woke up and saw the *Tweedy Bird* standing over my bed looking down at me laughing or hissing I could not tell which. It is in my mind I told myself. I had a Star Trek phaser toy on my dresser which made the sound effects from the television show and lit up like a flash light. I told you I was a fan. I told myself if this thing is in my mind, then this phaser is real and I press the trigger and in my mind's eye, I saw a beam of red energy shoot out of the toy hitting my target. The *Tweedy Bird* hissed and howled in pain as it was incinerated. I walked into my bathroom not turning the lights on flustered and I feel the presence of the creature from that night in the dessert.

I feel it standing behind me but that is impossible because the door was directly at my back.

"I pay the damn rent here! In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave my apartment" and I begin to cry. I remember slumping to the bathroom floor in the dark with the company of my personal demon. I wished my parents were here. I wished I was young so my parents can make the monsters in underneath my bed go away but this time this monster, these monsters were everywhere.

Jan 28

I meant to write more last night but my I am so exhausted. All night the *Tweedy Bird* came and went, came and went. It is getting exhausting banishing this thing. Why has Dale forsaken me? Why has God forsaken me? I noticed my prescription by the sink. I also noticed there are wine coolers in the refrigerator left over from our special dinner a few weeks back with Dale.

Sleepy now... Keewl I beaten you, no have no paiiin. I think me willllll be k.. sleeppee so toired.....

THE END